

Sūrah Ṣāffāt

Central Theme and Relationship with the Previous Sūrah

This *sūrah* forms a pair with Sūrah Yāsīn, the previous *sūrah*. There is no basic difference between the central themes of the two *sūrahs*. Just as the principle topics of monotheism, prophethood and the hereafter are discussed in the previous *sūrahs* of this group, they are also discussed in this particular *sūrah*; however, the nature of arguments and sequence of the discourse are different. Monotheism which is the soul to the body of this whole group is also evident in this *sūrah*. Yet, in this *sūrah*, a specific aspect of monotheism – refutation of divinity imputed to angels – is taken up in detail. The events of the Day of Judgement are mentioned in this *sūrah* in such a way that the mutual row between the masses and the leaders of the Idolaters is highlighted. The history of the prophets is also concisely mentioned in this *sūrah*. This history shows that nations which denied their messengers were destroyed by the Almighty; only the messengers and their followers were successful.

Analysis of the Discourse

Verses (1-10): Angels remain in the presence of the Almighty to always obey His directives and fervently praise and extol Him. Through their very deeds, they bear witness that they are very obedient to God and are not His associates, as certain foolish people think. Only the angels have proximity to God. The jinn and devils do not have access to the High Realm (Mala' A'lā). If they try to overhear the secrets of this realm, angels push them away and shooting stars pursue them; hence they are not able to eavesdrop on these secrets. Those who regard the jinn and the devils to be a means of divulging these secrets are not aware of the exalted status of God.

Verses (11-39): People who were making fun of the Hereafter are admonished. What will befall them and their leaders on the Day of Judgement is portrayed. The purpose of this is to assure the Prophet (sws) so that he should ignore their arrogant behaviour; a day is about to come when their masses will curse their leaders for stopping them from following the Prophet of God; in response, the leaders will rebuke their followers that they themselves are to blame for denying the truth after it

had become evident to them.

Verses (40-61): A description of the reward of the believers who in spite of the efforts of their companions and leaders who wanted to lead them astray continued to support a messenger of God. Certain aspects of the eternal bliss they shall attain on the Day of Judgement are referred to.

Verses (62-70): The fate of those who in their frenzy of blindly followed their forefathers opposed a messenger of God and his practice is alluded to.

Verses (71-148): Historical evidence is provided on the fact that nations which denied their respective messengers after these messengers had warned them were destroyed; only those people survived who followed their messenger. The blessing and mercy of God is reserved for the messengers of God and those who follow them.

Verses (149-182): In this concluding section, the discourse coherently returns to the opening topic of the *sūrah*: through the tongue of Gabriel, witness is borne to the fact that the fraternity of the angels continue to follow the directives of God with fervour and remain fervently busy in praising and extolling Him, and that angels are obedient servants of God and not His associates or partners. At the end, Muḥammad (sws) is assured that God's help and dominance over his opponents are reserved for him and his followers; these opponents are destined to lose. They are the ones who at first waited for the arrival of God's messenger; yet when he came, they started to vehemently oppose him because of jealousy and arrogance. He should ignore them and keep doing his job while exercising restraint. Success is destined for the messengers of God alone.

Section I: Verses (1-10)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالصَّافَّاتِ صَفًّا (١) فَالزَّاجِرَاتِ زَجْرًا (٢) فَالتَّالِيَاتِ ذِكْرًا (٣) إِنَّ إِلَهَكُمْ لَوَاحِدٌ (٤) رَبُّ
السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَرَبُّ الْمَشَارِقِ (٥) إِنَّا زَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بَزِينَةِ
الْكَوَاكِبِ (٦) وَحِفْظًا مِّنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ مَّارِدٍ (٧) لَا يَسْمَعُونَ إِلَى الْمَلَأِ الْأَعْلَى وَيُقَذَّفُونَ
مِنْ كُلِّ جَانِبٍ (٨) دُخُورًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ وَاصِبٌ (٩) إِلَّا مَنْ خَطِفَ الْخَطْفَةَ فَأَتْبَعَهُ
شِهَابٌ ثَاقِبٌ (١٠)

Angels who range themselves in ranks and remain present bear witness; then admonish [devils] and remember [God] that your God is

one. He alone is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them, and He alone is the Lord of the Eastern borders. (1-5)

Indeed, We have decked the lower heaven with the adornment of stars and have fully protected it from the incursion of all rebellious devils. And they are not able to overhear from the High Realm and they are pushed from all sides, to drive them away and for them is an eternal torment except that if someone suddenly eavesdrops on something a dazzling flame pursues him. (6-10)

Explanation

وَالصَّافَّاتِ صَفًّا¹

The particle *و* denotes an oath. The oaths sworn by the Almighty in the Qur'ān are not meant to venerate the object by which the oaths are sworn; they are meant to substantiate a claim. My mentor Imām Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī has dealt in detail on this issue in his book *al-Im'ān fī Aqsām al-Qur'ān*. I have translated this Arabic work into Urdu. Those interested may look it up. In the light of this denotation of the particle *و*, if the verse is translated as “angels who range themselves in ranks and remain present bear witness,” then it will truly portray the meaning of the oath.

The word *الصَّافَّاتِ* occurs here as an attribute of the angels, and this is evident from a succeeding verse of this *sūrah* through the tongue of Gabriel: (٣٧: ١٦٤ - وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الصَّافُّونَ وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الْمُسَبِّحُونَ) (١٦٦) (And for each of us is an appointed place and We stand arrayed before God. And We glorify Him. (37:164-166))

It is evident from concomitant indications that those angels are referred to here that belong to the High Realm and stand arrayed in ranks around the throne of the Almighty. In *Sūrah Zumar*, they are mentioned in the following words: (٧٥: ٣٩) وَتَرَى الْمَلَائِكَةَ حَافِّينَ مِنْ حَوْلِ الْعَرْشِ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ (And you shall see the angels encircling the throne of God, giving glory to their Lord while expressing praise for Him. (39:75))

فَالزَّاجِرَاتِ زَجْرًا²

The word *زجر* means “to scold and drive away someone”. It refers to another attribute of these angels: if the devils try to access the High Realm they are driven away. The details of the arrangement made by the

1. Angels who range themselves in ranks.

2. And remain present, bear witness.

Almighty to prevent the devils from accessing the High Realm are coming up in the succeeding verses.

فَالْتَالِيَاتِ ذِكْرًا (٣)³

This is the third attribute of the angels. These words refer precisely to the same thing as the one referred to by the words *يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ* of Sūrah Zumar cited earlier and by the words: *وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الْمُسَبِّحُونَ* (٣٩: ١٦٤) of this very *sūrah*. In other words, the angels praise and extol the Almighty.

Here a principle of the Arabic language must be kept in mind: when attributes are conjugated by the particle *فَ* as is the case here it signifies two things: firstly, all these attributes belong to a single entity; for this reason, the opinion of those who have regarded these attributes to belong to different entities is, in my opinion, linguistically incorrect; secondly, there occurs a gradual sequence in these attributes. According to my interpretation, it is evident that all these attributes belong to a single entity: the angels. It is also evident that there exists a sequence in these attributes the way it exists in our prayers. Just as we stand arrayed before God, seek refuge from Satan and then praise and extol God, in the same manner, angels too stand arrayed around the throne of the Almighty, then they rebuke Satan and after that praise and extol God.

إِنَّ إِلَهَكُمْ لَوَاحِدٌ (٤)⁴

This verse forms the complement of oath (*muqsam* 'alayh). After presenting this worship and praising and extolling of the angels as witness, it is said: Your God is One. It is evident from this that extremely foolish are those who have made angels associates of God by regarding them as His daughters and are worshipping them hoping to receive their intercession. The actions of the angels openly negate these naïve people: these angels continue to worship God and praise and extol him, while these naïve people worship these angels by regarding them to be God's partners.

رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَرَبُّ الْمَشَارِقِ (٥)⁵

This is the second enunciative (*khavar*) after the first. The implication

3. Then admonish [devils].

4. And remember [God] that your God is one.

5. He alone is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them, and He alone is the Lord of the Eastern borders.

is that it is God the one and alone who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them and He alone is the master of all the east and the west. In other words, no one should misconstrue that God has delegated the administration of the far off areas of His unfathomable dominion to His partners. He is not dependent on anyone for help. He alone is the master of every nook and corner of His universe and directly administers them. If there is any role of the angels in this universe it is not because they are God's partners; they are His obedient ambassadors and workers. Whatever they do is in compliance with the directives of God.

The plural مَشَارِق refers to the vastness of the east. In Sūrah A'raf while explaining the word أَغْرَاف, I have explained that at times plurals of a word indicate their vastness and enormity. The words مَشَارِق and مَغَارِب occur in the Qur'ān in this very sense. Similarly, when the purpose is to point to both sides of a thing, then at times the dual is used. Thus the words مَشْرِقَيْن and مَغْرِبَيْن are also used in the Qur'ān (55:17).

There is a suppression of the words رَبُّ الْمَغَارِب after رَبُّ الْمَشَارِق on account of contextual indications because the West is subsumed under the East [as the sun rises from the East and gradually lights up the West]; when what is primary is mentioned, the secondary is understood to be subsumed under it. At some instances, the suppression is expressed in words as well, as for example: (٤٠:٧٠) فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِرَبِّ الْمَشَارِقِ وَالْمَغَارِبِ إِنَّا لَقَادِرُونَ (Nay! I swear by the Lord who is the Master of all the vastness of the East and the West that We are powerful, (70-40)). Another reason for specifically mentioning the مَشَارِق could be that polytheists have worshipped the sun the most and the sun rises from the east.

إِنَّا زَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِزِينَةِ الْكَوَاكِبِ (٦) وَحِفْظًا مِّنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ مَّارِدٍ (٧)⁶

In the preceding verses, it is mentioned that the naïve have regarded the angels to be God while the actual situation is that in the High Realm they continue to stand arrayed before God and remain busy in praising and extolling him. Now in these succeeding verses, it is mentioned that the naïve think that the devils have access to the High Realm from where they can eavesdrop on the news of the unknown world. Thus on this very expectation are they worshipped since they are a means to know such secrets. The fact of the matter is that no one has access to the High Realm. If a mischievous jinn tries to go near it, he is bombarded by a shower of meteors.

6. Indeed, We have decked the lower heavens with the adornment of stars and have fully protected it from the incursion of all rebellious devils.

The word حَفَظًا is a verbal noun of a suppressed verb meant to emphasize it. Thus, the actual construction is: حَفَظْنَاهَا حِفْظًا. Hence a precise translation would be: We fully protected the heavens from the incursions of the devils. It is evident from the verses under discussion that on the one hand stars are an embellishment for the lowest heaven and on the other these very stars are used by the Almighty to check the devils from accessing the High Realm. This subject is discussed in the Qur'ān in various styles. For example: وَلَقَدْ زَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِمَصَابِيحَ وَجَعَلْنَاهَا رُجُومًا لِلشَّيَاطِينِ (٥: ٦٧) (And We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps and made them a means for bombardment on the devils, (67:5)). At another instance, it is said: وَلَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا فِي السَّمَاءِ بُرُوجًا وَزَيَّنَّاهَا لِلنَّاظِرِينَ وَحَفَظْنَاهَا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ إِلَّا مَنْ اسْتَرَقَ السَّمْعَ فَاتَّبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ مُبِينٌ (١٥: ١٦-١٨) (And indeed, We have made posts in the sky and decked it with stars for the beholders and protected it from every accursed devil. And if anyone tries to covertly overhear the secrets of the High Realm, then he is pursued by a dazzling star. (15:16-18))

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ إِلَى الْمَلَأِ الْأَعْلَى وَيُقَذَّفُونَ مِنْ كُلِّ جَانِبٍ (٨) دُحُورًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ وَاصِبٌ (٩)⁷

The negation of the verb in لَا يَسْمَعُونَ is meant to negate the purpose of the verb. In other words, the devils try to overhear the secrets of the High Realm but they are not able to even to do so. Whenever they try to do it, they are pelted from all sides. The word دُحُورًا means “to drive away” and “to repulse”, and the word وَاصِبٌ means “eternal”. In other words, they shall be accursed in this world in the manner just mentioned and in the Hereafter they will face eternal punishment.

إِلَّا مَنْ خَطِفَ الْخَطْفَةَ فَأَتْبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ ثَاقِبٌ (١٠)⁸

What is implied by this verse is that after this secure arrangement to repel these devils there is no chance that they have access to the High Realm or its secrets. What a mischievous devil can do is that he can try to snatch some part of them. To stop such incursions also a shining star pursues them from the forts of the heavens.

It is evident from all these details that neither are angels partners of God in any sense nor do devils have any access to the High Realm from where they can find out some information. Hence those who worship

7. And they are not able to over hear from the High realm and they are pushed from all sides, to drive them away and for them is an eternal torment except that if someone suddenly

8. Eavesdrops on something a dazzling flame pursues him.

angels by regarding them to be the favoured daughters of God are foolish and those who try to come into contact with the jinn by regarding them to be a means of procuring the secrets of God are also foolish. It may be kept in mind that the basis of polytheism and soothsaying of the Arabs was based on these two concepts. The Qur'ān by explaining the reality behind angels and the jinn has uprooted both these bases.

Section II: Verses (11-74)

Coming up are the details of the events of the Day of Judgement. The purpose is to bring to the fore the fate of the deities as well as of those who are worshipping these deities while leaving aside God. The way the leaders of the Idolaters and their followers will mutually curse one another, and the manner in which the believers adhered to the beliefs of monotheism and the Hereafter in spite of all the opposition are depicted.

Readers may not proceed to study these verses.

فَاسْتَفْتِهِمْ أَهُمْ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمْ مَنِ خَلَقْنَا إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ مِّن طِينٍ لَا رَيْبَ (١١) بَلْ عَجِبْتَ وَيَسْخَرُونَ (١٢) وَإِذَا ذُكِّرُوا لَا يَذْكُرُونَ (١٣) وَإِذَا رَأَوْا آيَةً يَسْتَسْخِرُونَ (١٤) وَقَالُوا إِن هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ (١٥) أَيُّذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَإِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ (١٦) أَوَآبَاؤُنَا الْأَوَّلُونَ (١٧) قُلْ نَعَمْ وَأَنْتُمْ دَاخِرُونَ (١٨) فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ فَإِذَا هُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ (١٩) وَقَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا هَذَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ (٢٠) هَذَا يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ (٢١) احْشُرُوا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا وَأَزْوَاجَهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ (٢٢) مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَاهْدُوهُمْ إِلَى صِرَاطِ الْجَحِيمِ (٢٣) وَقَفُوهُمْ إِنَّهُمْ مَسْئُولُونَ (٢٤) مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَنَاصَرُونَ (٢٥) بَلْ هُمْ الْيَوْمَ مُسْتَسْلِمُونَ (٢٦) وَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ (٢٧) قَالُوا إِنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَأْتُونَنَا عَنِ الْيَمِينِ (٢٨) قَالُوا بَلْ لَمْ تَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ (٢٩) وَمَا كَانَ لَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ بَلْ كُنْتُمْ قَوْمًا طَاغِينَ (٣٠) فَحَقَّ عَلَيْنَا قَوْلُ رَبِّنَا إِنَّا لَذَائِقُونَ (٣١) فَأَعْوَيْنَاكُمْ إِنَّا كُنَّا غَاوِينَ (٣٢) فَإِنَّهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُشْتَرِكُونَ (٣٣) إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِالْمُجْرِمِينَ (٣٤) إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ (٣٥) وَيَقُولُونَ أَإِنَّا لَتَارِكُوا آلِهَتِنَا لِشَاعِرٍ مَّجْنُونٍ (٣٦) بَلْ جَاء بِالْحَقِّ وَصَدَّقَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (٣٧) إِنَّكُمْ لَذَائِقُوا الْعَذَابِ الْأَلِيمِ (٣٨) وَمَا

تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٣٩) إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ (٤٠) أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ رِزْقٌ مَّعْلُومٌ (٤١) فَوَاكِهُ وَهُمْ مُكْرَمُونَ (٤٢) فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ (٤٣) عَلَى سُرُرٍ مُتَقَابِلِينَ (٤٤) يُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِكَأْسٍ مِنْ مَّعِينٍ (٤٥) بَيْضَاءَ لَذَّةٍ لِلشَّارِبِينَ (٤٦) لَا فِيهَا غَوْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ عَنْهَا يُنْزَفُونَ (٤٧) وَعِنْدَهُمْ قَاصِرَاتُ الطَّرْفِ عِينٌ (٤٨) كَأَنَّهُنَّ بَيْضٌ مَكْنُونٌ (٤٩) فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ (٥٠) قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِّنْهُمْ إِنِّي كَانَ لِي قَرِينٌ (٥١) يَقُولُ أَتَيْتَكَ لِمَنِ الْمُصَدِّقِينَ (٥٢) أَئِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَئِنَّا لَمَدِينُونَ (٥٣) قَالَ هَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُّطَّيْعُونَ (٥٤) فَاطَّلَعَ فَرَآهُ فِي سَوَاءِ الْجَحِيمِ (٥٥) قَالَ تَاللَّهِ إِن كِدْتَ لَتُرْدِينَ (٥٦) وَلَوْلَا نِعْمَةُ رَبِّي لَكُنْتُ مِنَ الْمُحْضَرِينَ (٥٧) أَفَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَيِّتِينَ (٥٨) إِلَّا مَوْتَتْنَا الْأُولَىٰ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَدِّيْنَ (٥٩) إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَهُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ (٦٠) لِمِثْلِ هَٰذَا فَلْيَعْمَلِ الْعَامِلُونَ (٦١) أَذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ نُّزُلًا أَمْ شَجَرَةُ الزَّقُّومِ (٦٢) إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهَا فِتْنَةً لِلظَّالِمِينَ (٦٣) إِنَّهَا شَجَرَةٌ تَخْرُجُ فِي أَصْلِ الْجَحِيمِ (٦٤) طَلْعُهَا كَأَنَّهُ رُؤُوسُ الشَّيَاطِينِ (٦٥) فَإِنَّهُمْ لَا يَكُونُ مِنْهَا فَمَا لُؤُونَ مِنْهَا الْبُطُونَ (٦٦) ثُمَّ إِنَّ لَهُمْ عَلَيْهَا لَشَوْبًا مِّنْ حَمِيمٍ (٦٧) ثُمَّ إِنَّ مَرْجِعَهُمْ لَإِلَى الْجَحِيمِ (٦٨) إِنَّهُمْ أَلْفَوْا آبَاءَهُمْ ضَالِّينَ (٦٩) فَهُمْ عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمْ يُهْرَعُونَ (٧٠) وَلَقَدْ ضَلَّ قَبْلَهُمْ أَكْثَرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ (٧١) وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا فِيهِمْ مُّنْذِرِينَ (٧٢) فَانْظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُنْذِرِينَ (٧٣) إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ (٧٤)

So ask them: “Is it more difficult to create them or the things We have created?” We created them from clinging clay. In fact, you marvel while they make fun. And when they are reminded, they pay no heed. And when they see a sign, they make fun of it and say: “This is but plain magic. What! When we are dead and turned to dust and bones, shall we be raised life; we and our forefathers also?” (11-17)

Answer them: “Yes you shall be raised and humiliated as well. Thus it shall be just one shout and they will look about. And they will say: “Woe betide us! This is the Day of Reckoning.” This is the Judgement Day which you had been denying. (18-21)

“Gather those who have wronged their souls and their companions and those who they have been worshipping besides God. Then lead all of them to the path of Hell. And hold them back a little; they also need to be asked something. What is the matter; you are not helping each other? In fact, today they seem to be very obedient. (22-26)

And they will turn to one another asking: “It is you who came to us from the right ...” They will reply: “In fact, you were the ones who did not embrace faith. And we had no power over you: in fact, you yourselves were a people rebellious. Thus the verdict of Our Lord came true for us. We will have to taste it. We misled you; we ourselves were among the misled.” Hence on that day all of them will share the torment. (27-33)

Thus shall We deal with the evil-doers. Such was their matter that when they were told that there is no deity but God, they would show arrogance and say: “Should we renounce our gods at the behest of a mad poet?” In fact, he has come with the truth and has come in confirmation of the predictions of the prophets. (34-37)

Indeed, you shall have to taste the grievous torment. And you are being rewarded for precisely what you had been doing. Only, the special servants of God shall be protected from it. It is these people for whom there shall be sustenance marked: fruits and they will be in honour in gardens of delight reclining face to face on soft couches; for them goblets of pure wine will be in circulation absolutely crystal clear; delightfully delicious to those who drink it; neither will it be harmful nor will they feel tired because of it. And for them will be bashful large-eyed maidens as if they are sheltered eggs of ostriches. (38-48)

Thus they will turn to one another questioning. A speaker from them will say: “I had a friend who used to say: ‘Are you among those who believe in the Hereafter – when we are dead and turned to dust and bones, will we be brought to account?’” He will say: “Take a little peep down.” So he will look down and see his friend in the very midst of Hell. “By the Lord,” he will say to him, “you almost ruined me! But for the grace of God I would have surely have been among the assailed. Is it not a fact that we will never die after our first death neither will we be punished?” Surely, that is supreme success. To this end let every one who tries should try. (49-61)

Is this not a better welcome or the *zaqqūm* tree? We have made this tree a trial for the unjust. It is a tree that grows in the innermost part of Hell, bearing fruit like the heads of devils. They shall feed on it, and with it they shall cram their bellies. Then there will be for them a mixture of boiling water. Then to Hell shall they return. They found their fathers erring. Then they also ran in their footsteps. And most before them among the ancients also went astray. And We sent Our warners to them. So observe the fate of those who had been warned. Only Our true servants remained protected from this fate. (66-74)

Explanation

فَاسْتَفْتِهِمْ أَهَمْ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمْ مِّنْ خَلْقْنَا إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ مِّنْ طِينٍ لَّا زِبٍ (١١)⁹

This verse discusses the possibility of the advent of Day of Judgement before the discourse goes on to discuss the events of that Day. People who deny the Prophet's warning about the Hereafter because they think that raising the dead to life is something improbable are posed a question through the tongue of the Prophet (sws). He is told to ask them whether it is more difficult to create the heavens, the earth, the seas, the mountains, the sun and the moon or human beings. So how can the God Who is able to create these things out of nothingness not be able to create a trivial thing as a human being again. In Sūrah Mu'min, this subject is mentioned in the following words: لَخَلَقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ خَلْقِ النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٤٠: ٥٧) (Creating the heavens and the earth is more difficult than creating people; yet most people know not, (40:57)). In Sūrah Nāzi'āt, the words are: أَأَنْتُمْ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمْ السَّمَاءُ بَنَاهَا (٢٧: ٧٩) (Is it more difficult to create you or the sky; He made it? (27: 79))

The expression طِينٍ لَّا زِبٍ means "sticking or clinging clay". What is implied is that the Almighty created all these things with clinging clay; no particular raw material was needed for this creation so that their recreation needed an effort to make that material available. The clay with which they were made is at the disposal of the Almighty in large quantities. Whenever God wants, He can recreate them; when it was not difficult for Him to create them the first time, how can it be difficult to recreate them?

The use of مِّنْ in مِّنْ خَلَقْنَا أَمْ diverts the mind to the fact that the comparison is between creating angels and the jinn. In this case the meaning would be: Ask them whether creating them was more difficult or other beings We created [like the angels and the jinn]; We created these people from clay and the angels and the jinn from light and fire respectively; so if We are capable of creating these creatures how can We be powerless to create them again.

بَلْ عَجِبْتَ وَيَسْخَرُونَ (١٢)¹⁰

The verse states that for the Prophet (sws) this rejection on the part of his addressees is astonishing, and for them this claim of his is the reason that they make fun of him. He is wondering how can a sensible person

9. So ask them: "Is it more difficult to create them or the things We have created?" We created them from clinging clay.

10. In fact, you marvel while they make fun.

deny such an obvious reality and they are making fun of him by saying that how can a sensible and sagacious person make such a claim. The implication is that he and his addressees are as far apart from one another as the East and the West; the Prophet (sws) is not rightly judging how far apart they are from him and hence their attitude is a cause of worry for him.

وَإِذَا دُكِّرُوا لَا يَذْكُرُونَ¹¹

This verse states the essential consequence of this vast mental gap: when their way of thinking so different that what to the Prophet (sws) is obvious is a matter of jest for them, then all his reminders and warnings are useless for them; whatever advice they are sounded goes waste; no reasoning has any effect on them.

وَإِذَا رَأَوْا آيَةً يَسْتَسْخِرُونَ¹² (١٤) وَقَالُوا إِن هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ¹³ (١٥)

The verse says that the greatest of miracles cannot convince such people. They do try to tease and harass the Prophet (sws) by demanding to see the Hereafter yet when a sign is shown to them, they make fun of it and call it plain magic.

أَيُّدًا مِّمَّنَّا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَئِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ¹⁴ (١٦) أَوْ آبَاؤُنَا الْأَوَّلُونَ¹⁵ (١٧)

These verses give words to the fun they make. They ask: When we die and decay into clay and bones, will we be raised to life again? Even more astonishing for them is the fact that their forefathers too will be raised to life; they think that all these things are far away from sense and reason. Hence, they think that those who threaten them of these things are mad.

قُلْ نَعَمْ وَأَنْتُمْ دَاخِرُونَ¹⁶ (١٨)

Since the question was raised by them out of jest its answer is given in a stern tone. They are told that indeed they shall be raised to life again and at that time they will be disgraced and humiliated.

11. And when they are reminded, they pay no heed.

12. And when they see a sign, they make fun of it and say: "This is but plain magic.

13. What! When we are dead and turned to dust and bones, shall we be raised life; we and our forefathers also?"

14. Answer them: "Yes you shall be raised and humiliated as well.

فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ فَإِذَا هُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ (١٩)¹⁵

The verse implies that these people should not mislead themselves by thinking that the Almighty will have to make a special effort to recreate them. This will happen through a mere shout. With the sounding of this scream they will suddenly rise from their graves and start to look around. In Sūrah Nāzi‘āt, the words used are: فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ فَإِذَا هُمْ بِالسَّاهِرَةِ (٧٩): (١٤-١٣) (It will be just a single shout, then, all of a sudden, they will be standing in a ground, (79:13-14)).

The horror and dread found in this style does not need any words for its expression.

وَقَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا هَذَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ (٢٠)¹⁶

When the Day of Hereafter which they are so arrogantly denying today arrives, they will curse themselves and say that what they had been denying has arrived.

هَذَا يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ (٢١)¹⁷

This is the reply they will receive from the angels: Yes this is the very day you had been denying.

احْشُرُوا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا وَأَزْوَاجَهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ (٢٢) مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَاهْدُوهُمْ إِلَى صِرَاطِ الْجَحِيمِ (٢٣)¹⁸

The expression الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا refers to the polytheists because polytheism is the greatest injustice. Contextual indication shows that the allusion is to the leaders among the polytheists.

The word أَزْوَاج here is used for companions, followers and associates.

The expression مَا كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ refers to the jinn deities they associated with God and the idols and stones they worshipped.

On the Day of Judgement, the Almighty will direct the angels to gather all of them and lead them to Hell.

15. Thus it shall be just one shout and they will look about. And they will say:

16. “Woe betide us! This is the Day of Reckoning.”

17. This is the Judgement Day which you had been denying.

18. “Gather those who have wronged their souls and their companions and those who they have been worshipping besides God. Then lead all of them to the path of Hell.”

وَقِفُّهُمْ إِنَّهُمْ مَسْئُولُونَ (٢٤) مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَنَاصَرُونَ (٢٥) بَلْ هُمْ الْيَوْمَ مُسْتَسْلِمُونَ (٢٦)¹⁹

These verses portray the humiliation that will occur on that day.

It will be said: Alright! Stop them for a while so that a question can be posed to them.

The words *مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَنَاصَرُونَ* express this question: Why is it that they are not mutually helping themselves today? In the previous world you were the flag bearers of one another but today neither are the leaders helping their followers nor are the followers being of help to their leaders; neither are those worshipped seem to be of any benefit to their worshippers nor are the worshippers showing any emotions for their deities; everyone is busy in his own self; now is the time for selflessness but everyone has become selfish.

The word *إِسْتِسْلَامٌ* means “to consign oneself” and “to be obedient”. The expression *بَلْ هُمْ الْيَوْمَ مُسْتَسْلِمُونَ* means that today these people have become very obedient and submissive; till yesterday they were supercilious and arrogant; today they have laid down their arms.

وَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ (٢٧)²⁰

The word *تَسَاءَلٌ* connotes “mutual questioning” and in the succeeding verses details are forthcoming about the altercation that will take place between the leaders and their followers.

قَالُوا إِنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَأْتُونَنَا عَنِ الْيَمِينِ (٢٨) قَالُوا بَلْ لَمْ تَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ (٢٩)²¹

Contextual indication shows that first verse is uttered by the masses and second by the leaders. In other words, the masses will say to their leaders: “you are responsible for this dire situation; it is you who always surrounded us from the right and the left so that we were not able to hear out the Prophet of God; if you had not impeded us we would have definitely embraced faith.” Leaders will immediately interject and say that this blame of theirs is totally baseless; they would never have embraced faith.

19. And hold them back a little; they also need to be asked something. What is the matter; you are not helping each other? In fact, today they seem to be very obedient.

20. And they will turn to one another.

21. Asking: “It is you who came to us from the right ...” They will reply: “In fact, you were the ones who did not embrace faith.”

Our exegetes have faced a lot of difficulty in interpreting the expression تَأْتُونَنَا عَنِ الْيَمِينِ; the reason is that they have failed to grasp its rather unique style. The Qur'ān has employed this subtle style at many instances wherein as soon as someone initiates a conversation an addressee interrupts him and tries to respond to him forthwith in order to absolve himself from the blame cast. I have referred to some examples of this style in the preceding *sūrahs*; some very telling examples will be seen in the succeeding *sūrahs*.

The style adopted in this expression is precisely the same. As soon as the masses will try to blame their leader and would utter the words: you would come to us from the right ... their leaders would understand what they want to say viz. “you people would come to us from the right and left to stop us from listening to what the Prophet (sws) has to say to us.” So, as soon as these followers utter the words عَنِ الْيَمِينِ (from the right), these leaders will take initiative and intervene and start to defend themselves. It is to portray this intervention and interjection of theirs that the Qur'ān has merely mentioned the words عَنِ الْيَمِينِ so that it becomes evident from the very style of the discourse that a day will come when the leaders will not even let their followers who are blindly following them complete their sentence; they will interject and declare their own acquittal. Verses 31-33 of Sūrah Sabā' have already portrayed the altercation between the leaders and their followers. Readers may look it up.

وَمَا كَانَ لَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ مِّنْ سُلْطَانٍ بَلْ كُنْتُمْ قَوْمًا طَاغِينَ (٣٠)²²

The word سُلْطَانٌ means “force and authority”. The leaders will continue their response by saying that they could never have forcibly stopped the masses from accepting faith and hence this blame is false; they would go on to address the masses and tell them that it is they who were disobedient and haughty because even after the truth had become evident to them they did not follow it and instead chose to follow their leaders.

فَحَقَّ عَلَيْنَا قَوْلُ رَبِّنَا إِنَّا لَذَائِقُونَ (٣١) فَأَغْوَيْنَاكُمْ إِنَّا كُنَّا غَاوِينَ (٣٢)²³

The above sentences further cite what the leaders will say: “There is no use blaming one another; we are sinners and you are sinners; for this reason, the prediction of God that He had made in response to the

22. And we had no power over you: in fact, you yourselves were a people rebellious.

23. Thus the verdict of Our Lord came true for us. We will have to taste it. We misled you; we ourselves were among the misled.”

challenge of Satan has materialized; He had said that He will fill the belly of Hell with Satan and all his followers; we will now have to necessarily taste the punishment which is ordained for wretches like us.” The words فَأَعْوَيْنَاكُمْ إِنَّا كُنَّا غَاوِينَ addressed by these leaders to their followers imply: “We would have been blameworthy if we were virtuous and we wanted to make you evil; we tried to make you like us; it was your lack of vision that you followed us and even greater a lack of vision is that you are blaming us for the fate you met for following us! Alas! How can we harvest good from evil!”

²⁴فَإِنَّهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُشْتَرِكُونَ (٣٣)

The verse states that the excuse of the masses that others are responsible for their error will be of no avail to them on that day. The Almighty has granted enough sense to each person so that he can distinguish between good and evil especially when those calling to the truth are present to challenge evil. Hence, both the masses and the leaders will share this punishment.

إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِالْمُجْرِمِينَ (٣٤) إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ (٣٥)
وَيَقُولُونَ أَأَنَّا لَتَارِكُوا آلِهَتِنَا لِشَاعِرٍ مَّجْنُونٍ ²⁵(٣٦)

Once the events of the Hereafter are narrated, these verses link them with the addressees of the Qur’ān: this is not merely the account of others; the Almighty deals in this manner with all criminals. Their crime was that when they were invited to profess faith in the One God, they would arrogantly draw away and express that why should they leave their deities because of a mad poet. So if people today make the same statement about their prophet, what is the reason that they will not be dealt with in the same manner as their predecessors. God deals in the same way with all sinners.

²⁶بَلْ جَاءَ بِالْحَقِّ وَصَدَّقَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (٣٧)

This verse answers the Quraysh: he who is inviting them to the belief

24. Hence on that day all of them will share the torment.

25. Thus shall We deal with the evil-doers. Such was their matter that when they were told that there is no deity but God, they would show arrogance and say: “Should we renounce our gods at the behest of a mad poet?”

26. In fact, he has come with the truth and has come in confirmation of the predictions of the prophets.

of monotheism and warning them of God's punishment is not a mad person or a poet; on the contrary, he is informing them of a certain happening. A very clear argument to validate his prophethood is that all messengers from Abraham (sws) to Jesus (sws) have predicted his arrival and his arrival corroborates these predictions and the teachings of these prophets of God; this person is neither a stranger to them nor are his teachings unique. The previous messengers have given news of his arrival and the previous scriptures corroborate his teachings. If they are not aware of these facts, they should ask the People of the Book; the honest among them will attest to these facts. Since all these premises have already been discussed in detail in the previous *sūrahs*, I have just hinted at them.

إِنَّكُمْ لَذَائِقُو الْعَذَابِ الْأَلِيمِ (٣٨) وَمَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٣٩)²⁷

These verses imply that the Quraysh should not regard the punishment the messenger of God is informing them of to be a product of his fancy and frenzy; it is a certain reality. If they deny him, then they shall necessarily have to face this woeful punishment; they shall not be wronged in the slightest manner and they shall be recompensed exactly according to their deeds.

إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ (٤٠)²⁸

The exception here is severed (منقطع). The implication is that the above referred to fate will be faced by every person; only those servants of God will remain protected from it who are chosen by His mercy. I have continued to allude to the fact that God chooses only those for His mercy and blessings who deserve this selection because of their faith and deeds. The word مُخْلَصٌ is used to point to the fact that whatever a person receives he receives because of God's mercy and favour; no other being has the authority to grant people any favour as understood by the Idolaters.

أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ رِزْقٌ مَّعْلُومٌ (٤١)²⁹

The verse states that it is these people for whom there shall be known sustenance with God. What is meant is that their timetable for eating and

27. Indeed, you shall have to taste the grievous torment. And you are being rewarded for precisely what you had been doing.

28. Only, the special servants of God shall be protected from it.

29. It is these people for whom there shall be sustenance marked.

drinking will be determined according to their wishes, and what is presented to them will be in accordance with their desire and selection. As for the dwellers of Hell, its keepers will throw before them some things whenever they want to and whatever is thrown before them will be the most unfamiliar and the most foul; on the contrary, that which is presented before the dwellers of Paradise will be according to their wish and desire; what is presented will not be unfamiliar to them so that they feel an aversion to them; they will be known and familiar. However, the standard of these things will be something reserved for the dwellers of Paradise. In Sūrah Baqarah, the words are: *كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِزْقًا قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأَنُوتُوا بِهِ مُتَشَابِهًا* (٢٥: ٢) (Every time they are fed with their fruit they will say: “Why, this is what we were fed with before.” In reality, it will be similar to the previous one. (2:25)). Readers are advised to read my explanation of this verse in order to understand the verse under discussion.

فَوَاكِهَ وَهُمْ مُكْرَمُونَ (٤٢) فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ (٤٣) عَلَى سُرُرٍ مُتَقَابِلِينَ (٤٤)³⁰

The verse states that fruits shall be presented to the dwellers of Paradise and they shall be dealt with in a very honourable way. It has already been stated in verse eighteen that the dwellers of Hell will be humiliatingly in the enclosure of Hell and in verses 62-67 it is stated that they shall be given the tree of *zaqqūm* for eating and boiling water for drinking. On the contrary, the dwellers of Paradise will be given fruits and treated with respect and honour.

The words *فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ* describe their permanent abode: they will be in gardens of bliss and hence will be able to access all favours and gifts of this place whenever they want and in whatever quantity they want.

The words *عَلَى سُرُرٍ مُتَقَابِلِينَ* portray their mutual love and affection: they will sit on thrones while facing one another. It is known that when people have malice and dislike for one another they sit while turning their faces away from one another. Since the hearts of the dwellers of Paradise will be very pure and clean for one another, they will sit while facing one another. Earlier the altercation that will ensue between the dwellers of Paradise has been referred to. These verses, in contrast, portray the circumstances of the dwellers of Paradise.

30. Fruits and they will be in honour in gardens of delight reclining face to face on soft couches.

يُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِكَأْسٍ مِنْ مَّعِينٍ (٤٥) بَيِّضَاءَ لَذَّةٍ لِلشَّارِبِينَ (٤٦) بَيِّضَاءَ لَذَّةٍ لِلشَّارِبِينَ
(٤٦) لَا فِيهَا غَوْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ عَنْهَا يُنْزَفُونَ³¹

The word كَأْسٌ occurs in Arabic for both a cup and for the drink it contains. The word مَّعِينٌ means “pure and unadulterated”. An example of this meaning occurs in verse thirty of Sūrah Mulk.

The word غَوْلٌ means “to kill someone secretly,” and from here it came to be used in the meaning of “a hidden harm.”

The word يُنْزَفُونَ means “to get tired” and also “to lose one’s senses”. Here, it is used in both these meanings. The effects of drinking wine not only are intoxication, tiredness and weakness but also losing one’s senses. The first of these is a form of physical harm and the second of these is a form of moral misconduct. The wine of Paradise will be devoid of both these defects. The verses mean that cups of pure wine will be passed around for the dwellers of Paradise. This wine will not produce any malice or hatred, will be pure, unadulterated and delightful for those who consume it; it will neither have any hidden harm nor will it make a person lose his senses. In other words, it will have all the qualities of superior wines and it will also be devoid of every ill-effect that the best of wines of this world has.

وَعِنْدَهُمْ قَاصِرَاتُ الطَّرْفِ عِينٌ (٤٨) كَأَنَّهُنَّ بَيْضٌ مَكْنُونٌ (٤٩)³²

No pleasure and delight of a person stands complete without women. So after mentioning other pleasures and favours of Paradise houris are mentioned which will be given to men. Readers may have observed that while mentioning the delights of Paradise the Arab taste has been specially kept in consideration because they were the foremost addressees of the Qur’ān. Similarly, the attributes used by the Qur’ān to describe these houris are the ones which classical Arabic poets used for virgin and beautiful women. The actual meaning of the expression قَاصِرَاتُ الطَّرْفِ is “women who lower their gazes”. It signifies their bashfulness and modesty. For the Arabs, the greatest beauty of a woman was her bashfulness.

The word عِينٌ is the plural of أَعْيُنٌ and refers to the fact that these

31. For them goblets of pure wine will be in circulation absolutely crystal clear; delightfully delicious to those who drink it; neither will it be harmful nor will they feel tired because of it.

32. And for them will be bashful large-eyed maidens as if they are sheltered eggs of ostriches.

women will be larg-eyes.

The words بَيْضٌ مَّكْنُونٌ mean “eggs of an ostrich.” In classical Arabic literature, beautiful women are often compared with eggs of an ostrich. Deliberation on this simile shows that it gives due regard to the chastity, protectedness and colour of women. The word مَّكْنُونٌ signifies that they are pure and untouched. It needs to be kept in mind that the Arabs were very sensitive and touchy in protecting their un-married women. It is known that an ostrich may go as far as to sacrifice his life in order to protect its eggs. The simile also denotes that these eggs are golden in colour. Arab poets often mention the golden complexion of beautiful women. The attribute صفراء (yellowish-golden) is very common for them for a beloved. I can present examples from classical Arabic literature to support all that I have said above; however, I want to contain myself from prolonging this explanation.

فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ (٥٠)³³

From here till verse fifty nine, a dialogue among the dwellers of Paradise is cited which will take place when they will be sitting on thrones in Paradise. Also evident from this dialogue is their extent of happiness for achieving success against combating hindrances for the cause of truth in the previous world. Moreover, this dialogue also reflects the bliss that will engulf them while thinking that they have been forever delivered from death and punishment.

قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِّنْهُمْ إِنِّي كَانَ لِي قَرِينٌ (٥١) يَقُولُ أَأِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُصَدِّقِينَ (٥٢) أَئِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَأَنْتَا لَمَدِينُونَ (٥٣) قَالَ هَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُّطْلِعُونَ (٥٤) فَاطَّلَعَ فَرَآهُ فِي سَوَاءِ الْجَحِيمِ (٥٥) قَالَ تَاللَّهِ إِنِ كِدْتَ لَتُرْدِينِ (٥٦) وَلَوْلَا نِعْمَةُ رَبِّي لَكُنْتُ مِنَ الْمُحْضَرِينَ (٥٧) أَفَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَيِّتِينَ (٥٨) إِلَّا مَوْتَتَنَا الْأُولَى وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ (٥٩)³⁴

A person from among the dwellers of Paradise will thus narrate a story

33. Thus they will turn to one another questioning.

34. A speaker from them will say: “I had a friend who used to say: ‘Are you among those who believe in the Hereafter – when we are dead and turned to dust and bones, will we be brought to account?’” He will say: “Take a little peep down.” So he will look down and see his friend in the very midst of Hell. “By the Lord,” he will say to him, “you almost ruined me! But for the grace of God I would have surely have been among the assailed. Is it not a fact that we will never die after our first death neither will we be punished?”

of his past to his associates sitting around him: “I had an acquaintance who would pose a question to me while being wonder-struck. He would ask me if I was also among those who believed in the Hereafter; he would inquire from me if I really believed that when people die and become mud and bones they would be raised to life again.”

After that he will utter the words هَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُّطَّلِعُونَ (look what happened to him) to his associates. This style is used in the Arabic language to urge and stir up someone – much like we say: “go find out; take a peep.” What he would imply would be: “The day about which that person fought with me has arrived; now find out about that person and his whereabouts.”

While uttering the above cited words, he himself will take a peep and will find that person in the centre of Hell, as is evident from the words: فَاطَّلَعَ فَرَآهُ فِي سَوَاءِ الْجَحِيمِ. The word سَوَاءِ means “middle”. Evident from these words is the powers of the dwellers of Paradise: while sitting on their thrones they would be able to see anyone they want to however far he may be and also would be able to talk to him.

After that, he will condemn that person for trying almost ruining his fate, as is evident from the words: تَاللّٰهِ اِنْ كِدْتَ لَتُرْدِيَ وَلَوْلَا نِعْمَةُ رَبِّيْ لَكُنْتَ مِنَ الْمُحْضَرِّينَ; it was only God’s grace that he was able to protect himself from his onslaught otherwise he too would have been inflicted by the same punishment as him.

After witnessing that person’s fate and his own success, he will leap with joy and gleefully declare to his companions: “Have we not been delivered forever from the jaws of death and from the pangs of punishment.” In other words, this is the greatest of successes. Deliberation on the style of these verses viz اَفَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَبْتَئِينَ اِلَّا مَا مَوْتَتَنَا الْاَوَّلٰى وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذِّبِينَ reveals that their success would be so far beyond their expectations that even after seeing it they would not believe in it and would seek the attestation of their companions.

اِنَّ هٰذَا لَهُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيْمُ (٦٠) لِمِثْلِ هٰذَا فَلْيَعْمَلِ الْعَامِلُوْنَ (٦١)³⁵

This is a comment of God on what they said: Real success is the one which will be reaped by those people who lived their lives while keeping in consideration the Hereafter; it is this target to which every person should aspire for. The implication is that even if those who are vehemently after the pleasures and lures of this life achieve some success, then for how long? At last, they have to die and one day rise before God

35. Surely that is supreme success. To this end let every one who tries should try.

to face reward and punishment. So why should they not strive for abiding and eternal success instead of going after transient triumphs.

أَذْلِكَ خَيْرٌ نُزْلًا أَمْ شَجَرَةُ الزَّقُّومِ (٦٢) إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهَا فِتْنَةً لِلظَّالِمِينَ (٦٣) إِنَّهَا شَجَرَةٌ تَخْرُجُ فِي أَصْلِ الْجَحِيمِ (٦٤) طَلْعُهَا كَأَنَّهُ رُؤُوسُ الشَّيَاطِينِ (٦٥) فَإِنَّهُمْ لَكَ لَوْحُونَ مِنْهَا فَمَالُؤُونَ مِنْهَا الْبُطُونَ (٦٦) ثُمَّ إِنَّ لَهُمْ عَلَيْهَا لَشَوْبًا مِّنْ حَمِيمٍ (٦٧)³⁶

After a mention of the dwellers of Paradise, this is a mention of the humiliation that the dwellers of Hell will suffer. This mention begins by a question: People have heard about the favours and pleasures the companions of Paradise enjoy; they should speak up if this hospitality is better or that of the tree of *zaqqūm* which the companions of Hell will encounter.

The words *إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهَا فِتْنَةً لِلظَّالِمِينَ* imply that God has made this tree a means of trial for the wrongdoers. By using this mention of the tree, they made a lot of fun of Hell. This is a reference to the fact that when they were told by the Qur'ān that in Hell they will be given this tree as food, then instead of learning a lesson from this, they started to ridicule it by saying: "What a place is this Hell? It has fire and tree and water in it?" It is then stated that this tree became a trial for them, and by taking its pretence they tried to deny a reality which they will have to face one day.

The verses *إِنَّهَا شَجَرَةٌ تَخْرُجُ فِي أَصْلِ الْجَحِيمِ طَلْعُهَا كَأَنَّهُ رُؤُوسُ الشَّيَاطِينِ* state the fact that these people express wonder that what kind of a tree grows in fire. The fact of the matter is that the nature of this tree is such that it can only grow and nourish in the pit of Hell. The second of these verses portray a very eloquent simile. At times a comparison is made with an imaginative entity but it is more comprehensible to the mind than tangible and observable entities. For example, at times we call a person with an unruly appearance and disheveled hair a ghost. Though a ghost is an imaginative entity yet every person has some concept of a ghost in his mind. Hence the way this comparison will portray such a person seldom will any other comparison match it. In a similar manner, here the leaves and thorns of the tree of *zaqqūm* are likened to heads of devils. It is as if several devils are standing with their heads naked. This comparison is imaginary; yet since a horrible concept of devils is found in the minds,

36. Is this not a better welcome or the *zaqqūm* tree? We have made this tree a trial for the unjust. It is a tree that grows in the innermost part of Hell, bearing fruit like the heads of devils. They shall feed on it, and with it they shall cram their bellies. Then there will be for them a mixture of boiling water.

merely listening to it makes the body shudder.

The verses say that this *zaqqūm* will become the food of the dwellers of Hell and so compelled will they be to consume it that they will fill their bellies with it. Then in order to swallow and digest it, they will be given boiling water to drink.

ثُمَّ إِنَّ مَرْجِعَهُمْ لَإِلَى الْجَحِيمِ (٦٨)³⁷

This *zaqqūm* tree will be given to the dwellers of Hell as the first act of their hospitality (*nuzul*) as is evident from verse sixty two earlier. Once they are fed with *zaqqūm* and boiling water, their real abode will be Hell where the results of all their deeds will come before them.

إِنَّهُمْ أَفْوَآبَاءُهُمْ ضَالِّينَ (٦٩) فَهُمْ عَلَى آثَارِهِمْ يُهْرَعُونَ (٧٠)³⁸

These verses describe the actual reason of their going astray: they did not use their sense and reason and, on the contrary, blindly followed their forefathers. Their forefathers had gone astray, and they selected to follow their ways. When the messengers of God asked them to use their sense and reason, and distinguish good from evil, they arrogantly rejected this call by saying that should they leave their deities at the behest of a mad poet. It is evident from this that blind following is the greatest factor in making a person go astray. In this world, the Almighty is testing the intellect and the intention of people; for this reason, a person who sends his intellect and intention into abeyance will never succeed in this trial.

وَلَقَدْ ضَلَّ قَبْلَهُمْ أَكْثَرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ (٧١) وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا فِيهِمْ مُنْذِرِينَ (٧٢) فَانْظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُنْذَرِينَ (٧٣) إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ (٧٤)³⁹

The antecedent of the pronoun in قَبْلَهُمْ is “the Quraysh”. From here, the discourse shifts to historical arguments.

It is stated that the way the Quraysh have gone astray, in a similar way many other nations had gone astray earlier and met their fate. This is a reference to the nations which were mentioned in detail in the previous *sūrahs* and which will also be mentioned ahead in this *sūrah*. The verses state that God sent many warners to them from among them to warn

37. Then to Hell shall they return.

38. They found their fathers erring. Then they also ran in their footsteps.

39. And most before them among the ancients also went astray. And We sent Our warners to them. So observe the fate of those who had been warned. Only Our true servants remained protected from this fate.

them of their wrong behaviour but like the Quraysh they too rejected them in their frenzy for blind following their fore-fathers. At last, they suffered the same fate which every nation necessarily does once the truth is conclusively communicated to it. Only those of God's servants were protected from this evil fate whom God's mercy had chosen – the implication is that the Prophet (sws) should rest assured that this fate will also befall these Quraysh; he should continue to do his work with perseverance and consign their matter to God.

Section III: Verses (75-148)

In the succeeding verses, the anecdotes of Abraham (sws), Ishmael (sws), Isaac (sws), Moses (sws), Aaron (sws), Ilyās (sws), Lot (sws) and Jonah (sws) are narrated and at the end of each tale occurs the repetitive motif "God has blessed His Messenger with mercy and peace, strengthened his propagation mission; this is how God rewards His servants who do befitting deeds." It is this motif which, in fact, is the summary of these anecdotes as well.

Till the mention of Aaron (sws) all prophets are cited in the chronological order; after that the sequence is based on the attributes of each prophet; details of this will be found when the verses are explained. In the light of this discussion, readers may now proceed to study the verses.

وَلَقَدْ نَادَانَا نُوحٌ فَلَنِعْمَ الْمُجِيبُونَ (٧٥) وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ مِنَ الْكَرْبِ الْعَظِيمِ (٧٦) وَجَعَلْنَا
دُرِّيَّتَهُ هُمْ الْبَاقِينَ (٧٧) وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ (٧٨) سَلَامٌ عَلَى نُوحٍ فِي الْعَالَمِينَ (٧٩)
إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٨٠) إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (٨١) ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنَا الْآخِرِينَ (٨٢)
وَإِنَّ مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ لَإِبْرَاهِيمَ (٨٣) إِذْ جَاءَ رَبَّهُ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ (٨٤) إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ
مَاذَا تَعْبُدُونَ (٨٥) أَفِئْكُمُ آلِهَةً دُونَ اللَّهِ تُرِيدُونَ (٨٦) فَمَا ظَنُّكُمْ بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٨٧)
فَنَظَرَ نَظْرَةً فِي السُّجُومِ (٨٨) فَقَالَ إِنِّي سَقِيمٌ (٨٩) فَتَوَلَّوْا عَنْهُ مُدْبِرِينَ (٩٠) فَرَاغَ إِلَى
آلِهَتِهِمْ فَقَالَ أَلَا تَأْكُلُونَ (٩١) مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَنْطِقُونَ (٩٢) فَرَاغَ عَلَيْهِمْ ضَرْبًا بِالْيَمِينِ (٩٣)
فَأَقْبَلُوا إِلَيْهِ يَرِفُونَ (٩٤) قَالَ أَتَعْبُدُونَ مَا تَنْحِتُونَ (٩٥) وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَا
تَعْمَلُونَ (٩٦) قَالُوا ابْنُوا لَهُ بُنْيَانًا فَأَلْقُوهُ فِي الْجَحِيمِ (٩٧) فَأَرَادُوا بِهِ كَيْدًا فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ

الْأَسْفَلِينَ (٩٨) وَقَالَ إِنِّي ذَاهِبٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي سَيَهْدِينِ (٩٩) رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (١٠٠)
فَبَشَّرْنَاهُ بِغُلَامٍ حَلِيمٍ (١٠١) فَلَمَّا بَلَغَ مَعَهُ السَّعْيَ قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ إِنِّي أَرَىٰ فِي الْمَنَامِ أَنِّي أَذْبَحُكَ
فَانْظُرْ مَاذَا تَرَىٰ قَالَ يَا أَبَتِ افْعَلْ مَا تُؤْمَرُ سَتَجِدُنِي إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ (١٠٢)
فَلَمَّا أَسْلَمَا وَتَلَّهُ لِلْجَبِينِ (١٠٣) وَنَادَيْنَاهُ أَنْ يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ (١٠٤) قَدْ صَدَّقْتَ الرُّؤْيَا إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ
نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (١٠٥) إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْبَلَاءُ الْمُبِينُ (١٠٦) وَفَدَيْنَاهُ بِذَبْحٍ عَظِيمٍ (١٠٧)
وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ (١٠٨) سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ (١٠٩) كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (١١٠)
إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (١١١) وَبَشَّرْنَاهُ بِإِسْحَقَ نَبِيًّا مِّنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (١١٢) وَبَارَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ
وَعَلَىٰ إِسْحَاقَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِهِمَا مُحْسِنٌ وَظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ مُبِينٌ (١١٣) وَلَقَدْ مَنَنَّا عَلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ
وَهَارُونَ (١١٤) وَنَجَّيْنَاهُمَا وَقَوْمَهُمَا مِنَ الْكَرْبِ الْعَظِيمِ (١١٥) وَنَصَرْنَاهُمْ فَاكْتَوَوْا هُمُ
الْعَالِينَ (١١٦) وَآتَيْنَاهُمَا الْكِتَابَ الْمُسْتَبِينَ (١١٧) وَهَدَيْنَاهُمَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ (١١٨)
وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِمَا فِي الْآخِرِينَ (١١٩) سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَهَارُونَ (١٢٠) إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي
الْمُحْسِنِينَ (١٢١) إِنَّهُمَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (١٢٢) وَإِنَّ إِلْيَاسَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٢٣) إِذْ
قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ (١٢٤) أَتَدْعُونَ بَعْلًا وَتَذَرُونَ أَحْسَنَ الْخَالِقِينَ (١٢٥) وَاللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ
وَرَبَّ آبَائِكُمُ الْأُولِينَ (١٢٦) فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَانْتَبَهُ لَمُحْضَرُونَ (١٢٧) إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ
(١٢٨) وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ (١٢٩) سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ إِلْيَاسَ (١٣٠) إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي
الْمُحْسِنِينَ (١٣١) إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (١٣٢) وَإِنَّ لُوطًا لَّمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٣٣) إِذْ
نَجَّيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ أَجْمَعِينَ (١٣٤) إِلَّا عَجُوزًا فِي الْغَابِرِينَ (١٣٥) ثُمَّ دَمَرْنَا الْآخَرِينَ (١٣٦)
وَأَنَّا لَمُتَمِرُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ مُّصْبِحِينَ (١٣٧) وَبِاللَّيْلِ أَفْلا تَعْقِلُونَ (١٣٨) وَإِنَّ يُونُسَ لَمِنَ
الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٣٩) إِذْ أَبَقَ إِلَى الْفُلْكِ الْمَشْحُونِ (١٤٠) فَسَاهَمَ فَكَانَ مِنَ الْمُدْحَضِينَ (١٤١)
فَالْتَقَمَهُ الْحُوتُ وَهُوَ مُلِيمٌ (١٤٢) فَلَوْلَا أَنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُسَبِّحِينَ (١٤٣) لَلَبِثَ فِي بَطْنِهِ إِلَىٰ
يَوْمٍ يُبْعَثُونَ (١٤٤) فَنَبَذْنَاهُ بِالْعَرَاءِ وَهُوَ سَقِيمٌ (١٤٥) وَأَنبَتْنَا عَلَيْهِ شَجَرَةً مِّن يَفْطِينَ
(١٤٦) وَأَرْسَلْنَاهُ إِلَىٰ مِثَّةٍ آلَافٍ أَوْ يَزِيدُونَ (١٤٧) فَآمَنُوا فَمَتَّعْنَاهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ (١٤٨)

And Noah prayed to Us; Thus how gracious are We in listening to prayers! And We delivered him and his people from a mighty scourge and made his descendants the sole survivors. And We left on his way a

group from the later generations: “Peace be to Noah among all people of the world!” Thus do We reward who do deeds in a befitting manner. Indeed, he was one of Our believing servants. Then the others We drowned. (75-82)

And to this group belonged Abraham also, when he came to the presence of his Lord with a pure heart. When he said to his father and to his people: “What are these that you worship? Do you desire false deities instead of God? Then what do you think of the Lord of the Universe?” So he lifted up his eyes to the stars and said: “I am feeling tired.” So his people left him and went off. He then stole away to their idols and said to them: “Will you not eat? What is it; you do not speak?” Then he struck them a heavy blow. So people came running to him. He said: “Would you worship that which you have carved with your own hands; It is God who created you and all that you make.” They said: “Make a building for him and cast him into the blazing flames.” Thus they tried to plot against him: but We abased them all. And he said: “I am going to my Lord; He will guide me. Lord! Grant me a righteous son.” So We gave him news of a steadfast son. (83-101)

Thus when he reached the age to walk about with him, he said: “My son! I dream that I am sacrificing you. So consider what you think.” He replied: “Father, do as you are being directed. God willing, you shall find me steadfast.” Thus when they had both consigned themselves to God, and Abraham had laid down his son prostrate upon his forehead and We called out to him, saying: “Abraham! you have fulfilled your dream.” Thus do We reward those who do deeds befittingly. This indeed was an open trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice. And We left on his ways a group from the later generations. Peace be on Abraham! Thus do We reward those who do deeds in a befitting manner. Indeed, he was one of Our believing servants. And We gave him glad tidings of Isaac, a prophet from among the righteous. And We blessed him and Isaac both. And among their offspring are those who do deeds in a befitting manner and others who clearly sin against their souls. (102-113)

And We showed favour to Moses and to Aaron and delivered them and all their people from a mighty calamity. And We helped them; and so they became victorious. And We gave them a Glorious Book and guided them to the straight path. And We left on their ways a group from the later generations. Peace be on Moses and Aaron! Thus do We reward those who do deeds befittingly. Indeed, both of them were from among Our believing servants. (114-122)

And Ilyās too was from among the messengers when he said to this people: “Have you no fear? Do you invoke Ba‘l and forsake the best of

Creators? – God Who is your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers.” But they rejected him, and will thus be among those seized. Not so God’s servants. And We left on their ways a group from the later generations. Peace be on Ilyās and his followers! Thus do We reward those who do deeds befittingly. Indeed, he was from among Our believing servants. (123-132)

And indeed Lot was also among the messengers when We delivered him and all his kinsfolk, except for an old woman who was among those who stayed behind. Then We destroyed others. And you pass by their settlements morning and evening; so do you not understand? (133-138)

And indeed Jonah was also among the messengers. Recall when he fled to a laden ship. Thus lots were cast and he was pushed away. Thus a fish swallowed him and was blameworthy of rebuke. So had he not been among those who extol the Lord he would have remained in its belly till the Day of Resurrection. We thus placed him on dry land and he was exhausted and caused a creeper tree to grow over him. And We sent him to a nation a hundred thousand strong in fact even more. Thus they professed faith in him; so We let them benefit from pleasures for awhile. (139-148)

Explanation

⁴⁰ وَلَقَدْ نَادَانَا نُوحٌ فَلَنِعْمَ الْمُجِيبُونَ (٧٥)

This is a reference to the supplication made by Noah (sws) before his Lord when after a very long time of preaching to his people he had lost hope in their embracing faith. It has been mentioned in verses 117 and 118 of Sūrah Shu‘arā’ earlier. In Sūrah Nūh, his invocation is mentioned in detail. Its last words are as follows:

وَقَالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ لَا تَذَرْ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ دَيَّارًا إِنَّكَ إِن تَذَرُهُمْ يُضِلُّوا عِبَادَكَ وَلَا يَلِدُوا إِلَّا فَاجِرًا كَفَّارًا (٧١: ٢٦-٢٧)

And Noah said: “O Lord! Leave not one of these disbelievers in the land. If You spare them, they will mislead Your servants and will beget none but sinners and disbelievers.” (71:26-27)

This invocation was made by Noah (sws) when he had exhausted all his energy. Hence, his pleading was answered by God forthwith. Thus all except those who professed faith in him were drowned, In Sūrah Nūh,

40. And Noah prayed to Us; Thus how gracious are We in listening to prayers!

the fate of these wretched people is stated in the following words:

مِمَّا خَطِيئَاتِهِمْ أُغْرِقُوا فَأَذْخَلُوا نَارًا فَلَمْ يَجِدُوا لَهُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْصَارًا (٧١: ٢٥)

Because of their misdeeds they were drowned; then were cast into a great Fire. And they found none to help them against Allah. (71:25)

The verse under discussion is meant to assure the Prophet (sws) and his companions; they should bear adverse circumstances with patience; God is not unaware of their supplications and untiring efforts; when the truth is conclusively delivered to his people, he will see how the help of God appears and how his enemies are routed.

وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ مِنَ الْكَرْبِ الْعَظِيمِ (٧٦) وَجَعَلْنَا ذُرِّيَّتَهُ هُمُ الْبَاقِينَ (٧٧)⁴¹

The verses state that the Almighty protected Noah (sws) and his companions from the great calamity with which all of his people were afflicted. The word أَهْلُ refers to all his family and clan who had embraced faith. Though this word can also refer to the followers of a person, yet it seems that only a few from among the progeny of Noah (sws) professed faith in him, and it was these who remained alive after the deluge and the world was populated through them later. All others were drowned because of their rebelliousness.

وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ (٧٨)⁴²

In this sentence, a governing noun (*mudāf*) and the object of the verb تَرَكْنَا is suppressed as per the linguistic principles of Arabic. If this suppression is accounted for, the whole sentence would be: "We left on his ways a group from among the later generations." This is an allusion to the success of his preaching mission: in spite of the animosity of his enemies, the Almighty made his propagation flourish; amongst the later generations came those who furthered this cause and his enemies were exterminated.

This verse too gives glad tidings to the Prophet (sws) that the Almighty will cause his preaching mission to grow and spread, it will persist in later generations and those who are opposing him today will be routed such that no one will remain to even take their name.

41. And We delivered him and his people from a mighty scourge and made his descendants the sole survivors.

42. And We left on his way a group from the later generations.

سَلَامٌ عَلَى نُوحٍ فِي الْعَالَمِينَ (٧٩) إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٨٠) إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا
الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (٨١) ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنَا الْآخَرِينَ (٨٢)⁴³

These verses praise and laud Noah (sws) and also give glad tidings to him regarding his success in this world and the next: the status he has achieved in this world was not achieved by anyone before. He stands unrivalled in this regard.

The words *إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ* declare the fact that this matter is not merely specific to Noah (sws); on the contrary, God always dealt in this way with those who befittingly conducted themselves and in future also He will deal with such people in this manner. This blessing is not specific to a person; it is rather specific to a quality of a person: those who conduct themselves with *ihsān* will be rewarded in this way by God. The word *ihsān* has been explained at many places in this exegesis. It means to follow the directives of God with full sincerity.

In the expression *إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ* the word *مُؤْمِن* is in its complete meaning. This expression is also meant to praise and laud Noah (sws) and means: he indeed was among those of our people who well and truly believed. The implication is that those who lay claim to faith and take to preaching they should try to follow this exemplary attitude. This is the real requirement of faith. People who in this manner well and truly believe in fact conduct themselves with *ihsān*. For such people is the blessed status which Noah (sws) was able to acquire.

The verse *ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنَا الْآخَرِينَ* means that the Almighty sifted out those who had this quality of *ihsān* in them; the rest were drowned by Him. This is the very purpose of creating this world: God will sift from it those who have this quality in them; the rest will be cast into Hell like waste material.

وَإِنَّ مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ لَإِبْرَاهِيمَ (٨٣)⁴⁴

After Noah (sws), the most celebrated prophet and messenger of God is Abraham (sws). About the latter it is said that he belongs to the same group and category as Noah (sws). Precisely the same preaching call was given by Abraham (sws) to his nation as the one given by Noah (sws) to

43. "Peace be to Noah among all people of the world!" Thus do We reward who do deeds in a befitting manner. Indeed, he was one of Our believing servants. Then the others We drowned.

44. And to this group belonged Abraham also.

his nation, and both exhibited the same level of faith and sincerity for the cause of God. In verse 78 above it was said that the Almighty left a group of people among the later generations on the way of Noah (sws). The reference here is to Abraham (sws) and his followers. Abraham (sws) preached and followed the way of Noah (sws). It may be kept in mind here that the way of all prophets of God is the same and that is the way of Islam. This issue has already been explained at an appropriate place of this exegesis.

Here it also needs to be kept in consideration that according to the Talmud, Abraham (sws) was instructed and trained by Noah (sws). Though I am not convinced of this; however, if this claim is considered to be true then this can be counted as another aspect which make Abraham (sws) among the group and category of Noah (sws).

٤٥ إِذْ جَاءَ رَبَّهُ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ (٨٤)

This verse expresses the total devotion and dedication as well as the perfect and complete sincerity of Abraham (sws) towards God. The expression قَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ refers to a heart which is totally free of the ailments of polytheism and hypocrisy. It is stated in Sūrah Shu‘arā: يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ (٨٨-٨٩) (Bear in mind the day whereon neither wealth nor children will avail; only they will succeed who bring forth to God with a clean heart, (26:88-89)). In other words, this verse refers to the fact that neither will there be any ailment of polytheism or hypocrisy in them nor will their allegiance be divided; on the contrary, their hearts will be free from all types of contamination and all their love and obedience will be for One God.

٤٦ إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ مَاذَا تَعْبُدُونَ (٨٥) أَفُفَّكَ آلِهَةً دُونَ اللَّهِ تُرِيدُونَ (٨٦)

In order to describe Abraham’s devotion and utmost sincerity to God and commitment to *tawhīd*, this verse refers to the call that he gave to his father and nation.

The words مَاذَا تَعْبُدُونَ signify humiliation and rebuke. In other words, he rebuked them by asking them what kind of baseless things they are worshipping.

The word فُفَّكَ means something which is false and baseless. In other words, the verse actually means: do they falsely and wrongly go after

45. When he came to the presence of his Lord with a pure heart.

46. When he said to his father and to his people: “What are these that you worship? Do you desire false deities instead of God?”

other deities besides God?

فَمَا ظَنُّكُمْ بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٨٧)⁴⁷

This short sentence encompasses very profound meanings. The implication is that if these people are desirous of other deities besides God, then what exactly is their estimation of God? Are they under the false estimation that God alone is powerless to cater for their needs and to protect them? Is He unable to administer this world independently and that is why they are after finding helpers for him? Are they under the false impression that God cannot be aware of every part of this world and of the circumstances of every person and hence in order to make Himself aware of this information He needs the help of other means and sources? Have they lost hope in His justice and mercy so that they have concocted some intercessors who will help them in procuring His justice and mercy? The implication is that unless a person has all these bad estimations about God he can never be as shameful as to tolerate partners with Him. And if a person has such a bad estimation about God, then he should remember that, God forbid, the Almighty is not devoid of honour and self-esteem so that He will put up with the interference of everyone in His Being and kingdom. On the contrary, He is powerful and strong and has a deep sense of honour; thus, He will cast into Hell all those who claim to be His partners in His kingdom or make others His associates.

فَنَظَرَ نَظْرَةً فِي النُّجُومِ (٨٨) فَقَالَ إِنِّي سَقِيمٌ (٨٩) فَتَوَلَّوْا عَنْهُ مُدْبِرِينَ (٩٠) فَرَاغَ إِلَى آلِهِتِهِمْ فَقَالَ أَلَا تَأْكُلُونَ (٩١) مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَنْطِقُونَ (٩٢) فَرَاغَ عَلَيْهِمْ ضَرْبًا بِالْيَمِينِ (٩٣)⁴⁸

It seems that the above referred to speech was made by Abraham (sws) at some eventful occasion in the worship place. After that he made a plan to make evident to his people the baselessness of their idols. The way he adopted for this was that when the event ended at night and people started to leave the place, he cast a glance on the stars as if he wanted to estimate the time and also informed the people that he was feeling tired. People thought that since it was late at night and this young man was tired after a whole day's outing, he did not want to go back to his house

47. Then what do you think of the Lord of the Universe?"

48. So he lifted up his eyes to the stars and said: "I am feeling tired." So his people left him and went off. He then stole away to their idols and said to them: "Will you not eat? What is it; you do not speak?" Then he struck them a heavy blow.

at that time and wanted to spend the night at the place of worship. This was quite a trivial issue; hence they left him and went to their homes. When Abraham (sws) was all alone, he secretly crept to the room where the idols were kept. At first, he made sarcastic remarks before them: why are you not eating the food placed before you? And why are you so silent? Why don't you speak up? After that, he struck them powerfully and smashed them to pieces. At another place in the Qur'ān it is said that he smashed all except the biggest idol. Surah Anbiyā' points out the reason for this.

This is a simple portrayal of the whole incident that is evident from the Qur'ān. However, our exegetes, God knows why, have cited certain narratives while discussing this incident evident from which is that Abraham (sws) had lied on this occasion and was also guilty of believing that the stars had some powers per se.

If Abraham (sws) cast a look at the stars, it was not because he had such a belief; he only wanted to estimate the time. Until watches were invented, people observed the stars at night and the sun in the day to calculate time. Just as today, every person instinctively looks at his watch to find out the time, in olden times they would look up to the sky for this purpose. It was for this very purpose that Abraham (sws) had looked up to the sky. It had nothing to do with superstition of star-worshippers or the powers of stars.

Similarly, his words *إِنِّي سَقِيمٌ* do not reflect a lie. In the Arabic language, the word *سَقِيمٌ* refers to “a sick person” as well as “a tired person”. If a discourse is not well-knitted, it is also called *سَقِيمٌ*. In this very *sūrah* ahead, while discussing the Prophet Jonah (sws) it is stated: *فَتَبَدَّلْنَاهُ بِالْغَرَاءِ وَهُوَ سَقِيمٌ* (١٤٥: ٣٧) (We thus placed him on dry land while he was worn out, (37:145)). Obviously, here this word is used to mean “one who is weak and feeble.” It is indicated earlier that the occasion was of some festivity in the worship place. On such occasions, every person gets tired and feels weak to some extent. Abraham (sws) felt this as well and since he wanted to spend the night in the worship place he, by glancing at the sky and uttering these words, gave this impression to the guards and keepers that because of tiredness and because of the fact that it was late at night he did not want to go back to his home and wanted to spend the night there. In this manner, though he used double-meaning words to spend the night there as a result of which the guards were led to believe him these words can in no way be considered as a lie or reflecting some evil belief. Such examples of double-meaning words can be seen in the previous pages of this exegesis.

The words *فَتَوَلَّوْا عَنْهُ مُدْبِرِينَ* portray the response of the guards and those

in charge. They gathered from the style and words of Abraham (sws) that the young man was weary and since it was late at night, he did not want to go home. They regarded this wish to be absolutely harmless; hence they did not interfere in it and leaving him alone went back to their homes.

Consider next the portion **فَرَاغَ إِلَى آلِهِمْ**. The verbal noun **فَرَاغَ** means to secretly and furtively go to or arrive at some place. It is thus evident from this word that he made his move when he thought that the guards had fallen a sleep. He then secretly crept to the place where the idols were kept.

The words **فَقَالَ أَلَا تَأْكُلُونَ مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَنْطِقُونَ** show that at first he uttered some sarcastic remarks: Why don't you eat these delicious meals and desserts? Why are you so quiet? Why don't you speak up? It is evident from these remarks that at the time when Abraham (sws) made his move he was not worried at all; in fact, he was in a very jolly mood that he has been provided with a very opportune moment to entertain these Gods and that his scheme was successful.

The construction of the sentence **فَرَاغَ عَلَيْهِمْ ضَرْبًا بِالْيَمِينِ** is actually **فَرَاغَ عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَضْرِبَهُمْ ضَرْبًا بِالْيَمِينِ**. Hence, an accurate translation of this verse would be: "He pounced on them to strike them with a mighty blow." The word **يَمِينِ** is used for the right hand, and since the blow struck by the right hand is hefty, here it is used to connote a mighty blow.

⁴⁹ **فَأَقْبَلُوا إِلَيْهِ يَزْفُونَ (٩٤)**

Here a part of the whole account is suppressed that can be understood in the light of what is mentioned in Sūrah Anbiyā'. When Abraham (sws) broke the idols, no one came to know of it at that time. Later, when the guards were informed of the incident, they cast the blame on Abraham (sws). They formed this opinion because they had heard him censure the idols, and had also sounded a warning that he will make a scheme against them. As a result, everyone came running to Abraham (sws) and started investigating him. At first, he made fun of the people and while pointing to the big idol retorted that it is he who must have done all this. At the same time, to make them realize their foolishness asked them to inquire from the idols what has struck them instead of inquiring from him; if they cannot subvert a calamity that struck them nor describe it, then what good are they? This argument by Abraham (sws) initially made them feel embarrassed but later emotional frenzy got the better of them and they replied that how can they ask their idols when Abraham

49. So people came running to him.

knows that they cannot speak. Abraham (sws) then rebuked and admonished them on this confession of theirs. At this, they got angry and conspired to burn Abraham (sws). However, the Almighty did not let them succeed in their evil designs.

قَالَ أَتَعْبُدُونَ مَا تَنْحِتُونَ (٩٥) وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ (٩٦)⁵⁰

Abraham (sws) rebuked his people in this manner when he had conclusively delivered the truth to them, as indicated earlier. He cried out to them: O wretched people, you worship idols that you carve out yourselves from wood and stone. God is worshipped because He created all of us; but such is your foolishness that you are worshipping what you have created from your very hands; in other words, you are the creators of your own creator; you should bear in mind that it is God who has created you as well as the wood and stones from which you carve out your idols and He has also created the jinn and angels whose statues you carve out.

Some scholastics have argued that the words وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ refer to the fact that God is also the creator of the deeds and actions of people. This interpretation from the verse is absolutely against the context and occasion. I have explained its true interpretation; hence, no need is left for its refutation.

قَالُوا ابْنُوا لَهُ بُنْيَانًا فَأَلْقُوهُ فِي الْجَحِيمِ (٩٧) فَأَرَادُوا بِهِ كَيْدًا فَجَعَلْنَاهُمُ الْأَسْفَلِينَ (٩٨)⁵¹

After this clear opposition by Abraham (sws), those in charge of the worship place took a decision to burn him in fire; however, instead of executing this plan openly, they tried to do it through a secret scheme. This is evident from the words فَأَرَادُوا بِهِ كَيْدًا (so they tried to scheme against him). The reason that they went for this covert scheme could be to not let Abraham (sws) escape and it could also be that his family would not cause any impediment in its execution. In tribal societies, tribal support has great significance. Thus it was precisely because of this reason that for a certain period of time the Quraysh were hesitant in openly adopting any aggression against Muhammad (sws).

It is difficult to answer what actual scheme they adopted against Abraham (sws). There is nothing in the Qur'an and the Torah that can help us in finding a definite answer to this question. What best can be

50. He said: "Would you worship that which you have carved with your own hands; God who created you and all that you make."

51. They said: "Make a building for him and cast him into the blazing flames." Thus they tried to plot against him: but We abased them all.

gathered from the verses is that the priests of the temple schemed to deceptively lure Abraham (sws) to the place where a great fire had been lit up and he be cast into it. From other places of the Qur'ān, it is evident that Abraham (sws) was cast into the fire but God's power and mercy protected him from it and the scheme of his enemies was aborted.

وَقَالَ إِنِّي ذَاهِبٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي سَيَهْدِينِ (٩٩)⁵²

After this incident, Abraham (sws) lost hope in his people professing faith and decided to migrate from there. The decision of migration is a very important decision. This is because a prophet has to decide to sever his connection from his environment and enter into a new one – and it cannot be known if this new environment is conducive to him. For this reason in this cause he reposes all his trust and faith in the help and support of God. The word سَيَهْدِينِ reflects his confidence that though he does not know what the future has in store for him but he is hopeful that God will guide him; it is his promise that those who strive in His cause are guided by Him.

رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (١٠٠)⁵³

Once a person severs his relationship with his relatives, family and tribe his greatest need is good companions. Thus, while migrating, Abraham (sws) prayed to God to grant him good companions in place of these evil ones. In my opinion, this prayer of Abraham (sws) does not merely relate to righteous offspring; it also relates to good companions and supporters. Pious offspring are the foremost companions among such a group.

فَبَشِّرْنَاهُ بِعُلَامٍ حَلِيمٍ (١٠١)⁵⁴

The Almighty accepted this prayer and gave him glad tidings of a son. It is quite obvious that the son referred to here is Ishmael (sws). Some of the reasons for this inference are very evident:

Firstly, he was the sole child of Abraham (sws) for which he prayed to God. Regarding Isaac (sws) I have already explained at an appropriate place that Abraham (sws) never prayed for him; he was granted to him as a reward for Ishmael's sacrifice.

Secondly, the succeeding verses mention his sacrifice and Abraham

52. And he said: "I am going to my Lord; He will guide me.

53. Lord! Grant me a righteous son."

54. So We gave him news of a steadfast son.

(sws) sacrificed him and not Isaac (sws). The interpolations made by the Jews in this incident have been exposed by my mentor Imām Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī in his book: *Fī man huwa al-dhabīh* (Which of Abraham's son was Sacrificed?) Those interested can consult this book.

Thirdly, the verse mentions the word حَلِيمٌ as a quality of this son. This quality signifies his steadfastness and fortitude that he showed before the knife of his father. It was a result of this behaviour that the Almighty conferred the titles of صَادِقُ الْوَعْدِ (true to his promises) and صَابِرٌ (patient) and حَلِيمٌ (steadfast) upon him.

It may also be noted that the Qur'ān mentions precisely the same quality of حَلِيمٌ for Abraham (sws). It is evident from this that Ishmael (sws) was the most prominent manifestation of his father's qualities.

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَ مَعَهُ السَّعْيَ قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ إِنِّي أَرَى فِي الْمَنَامِ أَنِّي أَذْبَحُكَ فَانْظُرْ مَاذَا تَرَى قَالَ يَا أَبَتِ افْعَلْ مَا تُؤْمَرُ سَتَجِدُنِي إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ⁵⁵ (١٠٢)

The word سَعْيٍ refers to the age in which a child starts to run and walk about. The verse states that when the son entered the age of walking and running about his father, a dream was seen by his father. In this dream, he saw that God was directing him to sacrifice his son for Him. It has been indicated earlier that Abraham (sws) was rewarded with Ishmael (sws) as a result of his prayer at the time when he had migrated from his family and people to another country. The only thing that was a means of assurance to him in this alien land was this sole son. Till that time, his son was in the age of walking about his father and helping him in his chores. It is evident from the Torah that at that time he was thirteen years old. Every one can see that at this age a son is loved the most by his father. Readers can see how tough a trial this was. However, no person can be truly perfect in his faithfulness to God unless he is ready to prepare to sacrifice the most beloved thing for God's cause. For this reason, Abraham (sws) was put through this trial. Though this directive was given to him in a dream and what is said in a dream needs to be interpreted and if Abraham (sws) wanted he could have interpreted this dream, yet this true and sincere person instead of interpreting the dream embarked upon obeying exactly what he was shown.

The words قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ إِنِّي أَرَى فِي الْمَنَامِ أَنِّي أَذْبَحُكَ فَانْظُرْ مَاذَا تَرَى show that the

55. Thus when he reached the age to walk about with him, he said: "My son! I dream that I am sacrificing you. So consider what you think." He replied: "Father, do as you are being directed. God willing, you shall find me steadfast."

first step that he took in this regard was to assess the courage of his son. He informed him that he was seeing a dream in which he was slaughtering him; he further asked him of his opinion on this dream. It is evident from the style of the verse that Abraham (sws) saw this dream more than once. Had he seen it just once the words *رَأَيْتُ فِي الْمَنَامِ* were more appropriate. Abraham (sws) also explained that though he saw this dream more than once, yet it was still a dream so that the whole matter is evident to Ishmael (sws). It seems that he had full faith in Ishmael's intellect and understanding. He was hopeful that his intellect will help him reach the right the decision in this regard.

It is evident from the words *قَالَ يَا أَبَتِ افْعَلْ مَا تُؤْمَرُ سَتَجِدُنِي إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ* that Ishmael (sws) understood this dream to be a directive of God and not a mere vision and replied forthwith that his father should obey it without any hesitation and rest assured that he himself was ready for it; his father will find him fully steadfast.

⁵⁶ *فَلَمَّا أَسْلَمَا وَتَلَّهُ لِلْجَبِينِ (١٠٣)*

This verse depicts the actual act of sacrifice. The word *أَسْلَمَ* means to submit oneself to God. In other words, both the father and the son got ready for the test. The father took out a knife to slaughter his son and the son submitted himself for sacrifice. The words imply that the father prostrated his son before him on his forehead. Some people are of the opinion that Abraham (sws) took this measure to avoid eye-contact with his beloved son while slaughtering so that any feeling of sympathy may not impede the process. Yet in my opinion this interpretation is not correct. A father who is prepared to slaughter his sole and beloved son does not need such assurances. In my opinion, the reason for this was that he wanted to sacrifice his son while the latter was in the state of prostration; for this reason, he laid him on his forehead. The posture of prostration is the most likeable in Islam viz a viz proximity to God. At another place, the words used are: *وَاسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ (٩٦: ٩٩)* (bow down in prostration and draw near your Lord, (96:19)). This status of the posture of prostration is acknowledged by earlier religions as well. It may be noted that this incident happened when the House of God had not been built and there was no prescribed direction for praying. Had there been a prescribed direction, Abraham (sws) may have prostrated his son towards it the way we do so when we sacrifice animals.

56. Thus when they had both consigned themselves to God, and Abraham had laid down his son prostrate upon his forehead.

وَنَادَيْنَاهُ أَنْ يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ (١٠٤) قَدْ صَدَّقْتَ الرُّؤْيَا إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (١٠٥)⁵⁷

As Abraham (sws) was about to slaughter Ishmael (sws), the Almighty called out to him and said that he had made his dream come true and the success he has achieved in this trial is a reward of his befitting behaviour and sincere attitude. It is in this manner that the Almighty grants success to such servants of His in various trials.

It has been indicated earlier that whatever is shown in a dream requires interpretation. The purpose of this dream shown to Abraham (sws) was to ask him to dedicate his son to the service of God; the purpose was not that he actually slaughters him. Thus when he got prepared to sacrifice his son, the real purpose of the dream was fulfilled. So the Almighty gave him the glad tidings that the purpose of the dream has been fulfilled; nothing further is required. People who have inferred from this that the Almighty abrogated His own directive before it was carried out have gone to uncalled for limits. In the wake of the correct interpretation of the verse, refutation of this view is not needed.

It is evident from the words كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ that people who try to fulfill all the directives of God in a befitting manner and in a way that they should be really fulfilled are bestowed with big success by Him in great trials and also the eternal kingdom of Paradise as a reward. On the other hand, people who adopt an escapist policy towards religion gradually lose the ability to face the trials of God. The result of this is that the doors of success in the Hereafter are closed to them.

إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْبَلَاءُ الْمُبِينُ (١٠٦)⁵⁸

The Almighty has praised Abraham (sws) in this verse for his success: the trial was not trivial; it was a great one. Abraham (sws) came out of it in flying colours. A trial which is regarded to be great by the Almighty Himself is undoubtedly great. And if Abraham (sws) succeeded in this trial in such a manner that God Himself lauded him by the majestic words قَدْ صَدَّقْتَ الرُّؤْيَا (you have fulfilled your dream), then there can be no doubt about the fact that no greater a trial ever took place on this earth and no greater a success was achieved by anyone than Abraham (sws).

57. And We called out to him, saying: "Abraham! You have fulfilled your dream." Thus do We reward those who do deeds befittingly.

58. This indeed was an open trial.

وَقَدَيْنَاهُ بِذَبْحٍ عَظِيمٍ (١٠٧)⁵⁹

The verse states: We ransomed Ishmael (sws) through a great sacrifice. This is a reference to the fact that the Almighty directed Abraham (sws) to slaughter a ram in place of his son and this act of slaughter will be commemorated as a great sacrifice offered by all generations to come. It is this sacrifice which by being included in the rituals of *hajj* is being continuously offered from the times of Abraham (sws) till today and will continue to be offered till the Day of Judgement. Here, it may be kept in mind that though the ritual of animal sacrifice is found in all ancient religions starting from Adam (sws), yet no sacrifice has assumed such significant and universal status as this Abrahamic sacrifice.

وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ (١٠٨)⁶⁰

This is a repetitive verse. Previously it occurred at the end of Noah's anecdote. It has been explained that amongst earlier generations the Almighty kept a group steadfast on the teachings of Abraham (sws). In Sūrah Shu'arā the following prayer of Abraham (sws) was mentioned: (وَاجْعَلْ لِّي لِسَانَ صِدْقٍ فِي الْآخِرِينَ (٢٦: ٨٤) (Lord! Grant me an abiding remembrance among later generations, (26:84)). The Almighty accepted this prayer and granted him eternal fame that stands unparalleled in history.

سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ (١٠٩)⁶¹

This is an independent sentence: may peace and blessings be on Abraham (sws) in this world and in the next for his truthfulness and sincerity. The word سَلَامٌ is not defined by the article ال to express its majesty.

كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (١١٠)⁶²

The word كَذَٰلِكَ (in this manner) points to the peace and blessings mentioned in the previous verse. The verse states that the Almighty in this manner confers peace and blessings to His servants who are sincere and act in a befitting manner.

59. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice.

60. And We left on his ways a group from the later generations.

61. Peace be on Abraham!

62. Thus do We reward those who do deeds befittingly.

إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ⁶³(١١١)

The word مُؤْمِنِينَ is in its complete meaning. Thus the verse would mean: “Indeed Abraham was from among our thorough believers.” Evident from this is the essence of faith: it is one which has the spirit of sincerity and thoroughness in it – one whose example was presented by Abraham (sws). Not every faith to which a person lays claim to is worthy in the eyes of God.

وَكَشَرْنَاهُ إِسْحَقَ نَبِيًّا مِّنَ الصَّالِحِينَ⁶⁴(١١٢)

As reward for success in this trial, the Almighty gave Abraham (sws) the glad tidings of his second son – Isaac (sws). While giving these glad tidings to him, the Almighty also stated that the son would be from among the righteous and that He will confer the status of prophethood on him. The reason that these traits of a new son were mentioned with his glad tidings was that the mere birth of another son was of no significance to Abraham (sws). After Ishmael (sws) his thirst for a child had been quenched. Thus it is evident from the Torah that when he was given the glad tidings of the birth of Isaac (sws), he is reported to have said: “I wish only Ishmael continues to live in your presence.” However, what could really constitute glad tidings for him was the mention of a son who would not only be righteous but also be a prophet of God.

It is evident from this discussion that the story concocted by the Jews that it was Isaac (sws) who was offered for sacrifice by Abraham (sws) is totally baseless. He was born after the incident of sacrifice. He was not the one offered for sacrifice; rather he was the son who was given to Abraham (sws) as reward for offering a sacrifice.

وَبَارَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَىٰ إِسْحَقَ وَمِنَ ذُرِّيَّتِهِمَا مُحْسِنٌ وَظَالِمٌ لَّنَفْسِهِ مُبِينٌ⁶⁵(١١٣)

The antecedent of the genitive pronoun in عَلَيْهِ is Ishmael (sws). Those who regard this antecedent to be Abraham (sws) have grossly erred in their interpretation. Has this been the case, then the word ذُرِّيَّتِهِمَا (the progeny of both) should have been: ذُرِّيَّتِهِ (his progeny). This is because

63. Indeed, He was one of Our believing servants.

64. And We gave him glad tidings of Isaac, a prophet from among the righteous.

65. And We blessed him and Isaac both. And among their offspring are those who do deeds in a befitting manner and others who clearly sinned against their souls.

Isaac (sws) is not parallel to Abraham (sws) but from among his progeny.

The verse states that the Almighty blessed both Ishmael (sws) and Isaac (sws). The progeny of both prospered and multiplied. Among their progeny, some are righteous and sincere believers like their fathers and some while totally deviating from their path are inflicted with polytheism and disbelief and in this manner have become among those who openly wrong their souls. It is as if both the Ishmaelites and the Israelites are reminded at a very opportune time of their great ancestors and of the way they should adopt and of the way they have actually deviated to.

Here a grammatical question does arise: What began with the conditional clause وَلَدَجِبِينَ (Thus when they had both consigned themselves to God) is continuing till this verse; so what is the answer to the conditional particle needs to: لَمَّا (when)? It has been explained many times in this exegesis that at times the answer to conditional clauses like this is suppressed and the intensity of the tone of the speaker is reflected by this suppression. This suppression is employed at instances where such is the nature of the answer that words are unable to express their intensity. A clear example of this is coming up in Sūrah Zumar: وَسَبِّحُوا الذِّينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى الْحَنَّةِ زُمَرًا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاؤُوهَا وَفُتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ فَادْخُلُوهَا خَالِدِينَ (And those who feared their Lord shall be led in throngs to Paradise. Until when they draw near it and its gates will be opened, and its keepers will say to them: "Peace be to you! Be happy; enter it forever." (39: 73)) It can be seen that in this verse too the answer to the conditional statement: Until when they draw near it ... is suppressed. This suppression is evident from the intensity of the discourse. Similar is the case with the verse under discussion. Words are unable to express the intensity of the suppressed part. However, the suppression is self-evident: when the father and the son in order to please the Almighty took this step, one should imagine how many great blessings of God they became worthy of.

وَلَقَدْ مَنَّآ عَلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَهَارُونَ (١١٤) وَخَيَّرْنَاهُمَا وَقَوْمَهُمَا مِنَ الْكَرْبِ الْعَظِيمِ (١١٥)
وَنَصَرْنَاهُمْ فَكَانُوا هُمُ الْغَالِبِينَ (١١٦)⁶⁶

The most celebrated of messengers of God after Abraham (sws) were Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) who became the pioneers of a great

66. And We showed favour to Moses and to Aaron and delivered them and all their people from a mighty calamity. And We helped them; so they became victorious.

ummah after defeating a powerful enemy and the *sharī'ah* which they brought reigned over a large area for a long period of time. It is stated that the Almighty blessed Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) with the guidance of the *sharī'ah* and delivered them and their people: the Israelites from a huge burden – slavery of the Pharaoh and helped them. As a result, they triumphed. The word نَصَرْنَاهُمْ points to the triumphs notched up by the Israelites as a nation when they migrated from Egypt.

وَأَتَيْنَاهُمَا الْكِتَابَ الْمُسْتَبِينَ (١١٧) وَهَدَيْنَاهُمَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ (١١٨)⁶⁷

The expressions الْكِتَابَ الْمُسْتَبِينَ and الْكِتَابَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ have the same meaning. They refer to the Torah. Before it, the Almighty never gave the *sharī'ah* to any *ummah* in the form of a clear book. People were taught orally. The Torah has the distinction of being composed of the *sharī'ah* in the form of an arranged and clear book.

Though the Torah was formally only revealed to Moses (sws), yet since Aaron (sws) was made a co-messenger with him the verse ascribes the Torah to Aaron (sws) as well. About both of them, it is stated that the Almighty guided them to the straight path. This mention also secondarily refutes the blames cast by the Jews on Aaron (sws) and which have been referred to at an appropriate place in this exegesis.

وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِمَا فِي الْآخِرِينَ (١١٩) سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَهَارُونَ (١٢٠) إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (١٢١) إِنَّهُمْ مِّنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (١٢٢)⁶⁸

The above verses are repetitive and thus occur earlier as well where every part has been fully explained. The implication is that after these two messengers, people continued to follow their ways; God sent His mercy and blessings on them and their enemies were humiliated; it is in this manner that the Almighty rewards those of His servants who are sincere and befittingly practice religion. In other words, even if today there are such people, they too will be entitled to God's mercy and blessings and God will grant permanence to their ways. Moreover, bearers of their message will be born and their name will shine in the annals of history.

Till these verses, celebrated prophets of God and their achievements

67. And We gave them a Glorious Book and guided them to the straight path.

68. And We left on their ways a group from the later generations. Peace be on Moses and Aaron! Thus do We reward those who do deeds befittingly. Indeed, both of them were from among Our believing servants.

have been mentioned, and they were mentioned in a chronological sequence. In the succeeding verses, the prophets Ilyās (sws), Lot (sws) and Jonah (sws) are briefly mentioned.

The Prophet Ilyās is called Elijah in the Torah and he lived around 789 BC. In verse 85 of Sūrah An‘ām, his name is mentioned along with Zakariyyā (sws), John the Baptist (sws) and Jonah (sws). It is evident from this that he had the same attributes as these prophets. Some people think that Ilyās (sws) is actually Idrīs (sws); however, this view is not correct. Idrīs (sws) is mentioned in the Qur’ān by his own name.

Lot (sws) is a relative of Abraham (sws) and was trained and instructed by him. Both belong to the same era.

Jonah (sws) is mentioned in detail in Sūrah Yūnus and Sūrah Anbiyā’. Overwhelmed by his sense of honour for the truth, he migrated from his people before he was granted permission by God; at this, he was punished and he went back to his people. After that, he called upon them to embrace faith which all of them did.

The purpose of mentioning these prophets is the same for which prophets prior to them were mentioned. Though these prophets were not able to acquire the same might and power as Noah (sws), Abraham (sws) and Moses (sws) and they had to work in an alien environment yet God furthered their work as well and after them their preaching and their practices continued to survive. The importance of Jonah (sws) being mentioned in the end is meant to convey a special message: hastiness for the cause of disseminating the truth even if it is caused by one’s sense of honour for the truth is not allowed to a prophet; he should keep doing his work with patience and perseverance. It is only God Who knows when a nation has become bereft of the potential to accept faith and no further time should be granted to it.

وَإِنَّ إِلْيَاسَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٢٣) إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ (١٢٤) أَتَدْعُونَ بَعْلًا وَتَذَرُونَ أَحْسَنَ الْخَالِقِينَ (١٢٥) وَاللَّهَ رَبَّكُمْ وَرَبَّ آبَائِكُمُ الْأَوَّلِينَ (١٢٦)⁶⁹

Ba‘l is the name of the deity worshipped by the people of Ilyās. It seems quite probable that the city of Ba‘balak was named after it because bak is the shortened form of Bakkah which means “city”. Ilyās called to him people thus: “O Wretched people! While leaving aside Allah, the Best of Creators Who is your Lord and of your forefathers, you worship

69. And Ilyās too was from among the messengers when he said to this people: “Have you no fear? Do you invoke Ba‘l and forsake the best of Creators? – God Who is your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers.”

Ba‘l.” The expression shows that not only is God their creator; He is the best of Creators; He created them and blessed them with all abilities of head and heart; it is He alone Who is nourishing them; He is their Lord and of all their ancestors; so what is the reason of leaving him and worshipping Ba‘l? Does he have a role in creating and nourishing them?

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَإِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ (١٢٧) إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ (١٢٨)⁷⁰

The verse states that his people rejected him as a result of which all of these rejecters will be presented before God as sinners. Only those will not suffer this fate who the Almighty chose for His worship, and those who professed faith in Ilyās (sws).

وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ (١٢٩)⁷¹

This is the repetitive verse which occurs after every prophetic anecdote. The implication is that those who opposed Ilyās (sws) were forgotten by posterity but God made their name and message live on.

سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ آلِ يَاسِينَ (١٣٠) إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (١٣١) إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (١٣٢)⁷²

The word *آلِ يَاسِينَ* is the plural of *إِلْيَاسَ* and refers to all their progeny and followers. In the Arabic language, such plurals refer to all components and corollaries of the noun they signify. The Qur’ān has used the plural *طُورِ سِينِينَ* of the word *طُور* on similar lines. Evident from this is that the blessings and mercy received by a prophet also extend to his true followers.

The verse *إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ* has already been explained. Its repetitive occurrence is meant to point to the fact that it refers to an established practice of God. God makes the name of such people endure who display such faith and virtuosity, and those who oppose such people are forgotten by later generations.

وَإِنَّ لَوْطًا لَّمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٣٣) إِذْ نَجَّيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ أَجْمَعِينَ (١٣٤) إِلَّا عَجُوزًا فِي الْغَابِرِينَ (١٣٥) ثُمَّ دَمَرْنَا الْآخَرِينَ (١٣٦) وَإِنَّا لَمُتَمَرُّونَ عَلَيْهِمْ مُّصْبِحِينَ (١٣٧) وَبِاللَّيْلِ أَفَلَا

70. But they rejected him, and will thus be among those seized. Not so God’s servants.

71. And We left on their ways a group from the later generations.

72. Peace be on Ilyās and his followers! Thus do We reward those who do deeds befittingly. Indeed, he was from among Our believing servants.

تَعْقِلُونَ (١٣٨)⁷³

This is a reference to the account of Lot (sws) and his people. It is stated that he too was from among the messengers of God; his people also denied him as a result of which the Almighty delivered him and all his relatives who professed faith in him from torment, and all the rest were destroyed. One of his family was his old wife who was among those who were left behind with his nation because she had deprived herself of faith; so she was destroyed with the rest. This is because merely being a relative of a prophet is of no avail; what is of avail is faith and righteous deeds.

At the end of this section, instead of the repetitive verses which occur after the accounts of all the previously mentioned prophets, the Quraysh are addressed and told that since they continue to pass by the settlements of the people of Lot (sws) day and night in their trade journeys, why don't they contemplate that why would the established practice of God change for them – the established practice of destroying those who deny their respective messenger. In other words, since the repetitive verses were self-evident here they were suppressed and an apt admonition was sounded to the addressees of the *sūrah*. An occasion for this very appropriate warning arose with the mention of the settlements of the people of Lot (sws) by which the Quraysh frequently passed by.

وَأَنَّ يُؤْثِرُوا لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٣٩) إِذْ أَبَقَ إِلَى الْفُلْكِ الْمَشْحُونِ (١٤٠)⁷⁴

The account of Jonah (sws) has already been mentioned in Sūrah Yūnus, Sūrah Anbiyā' and some other *sūrahs*. At an appropriate place of this exegesis, I have already pointed out in detail how the narrators of the Torah have messed up this account. Jonah (sws) was sent to the people of Nineveh. When his people did not give due consideration to his preaching, his passionate sense of honour for the truth made him leave them; he embarked on a ship that was ready to set sail for some destination. During the journey, the ship was caught in a storm. As per their tradition, the ship travelers decided that some person has embarked on it who is a sinner and unless he is off loaded from it into the sea the

73. And indeed Lot was also among the messengers when We delivered him and all his kinsfolk, except for an old woman who was among those who stayed behind. Then We destroyed others. And you pass by their settlements morning and evening; so do you not understand?

74. And indeed Jonah was also among the messengers. Recall when he fled to a laden ship.

ship will not be able to come out of this storm. At last, it was decided that lots will be cast to find out who that criminal was. The lots fell on Jonah (sws) and he was thrown into the sea. Here, probably a shark swallowed him but God saved him because he realized his folly and extolled the Almighty. The shark spitted him out on a sandy shore. There in order to save him from the extreme heat of the sun, the Almighty caused a gourd creeper to grow. Its shade protected him in this state of weakness. At last, when he fully recovered, the Almighty once again asked him to go back to his people and to preach his message to them. This time all the inhabitants of Nineveh – numbering almost one hundred and fifty thousand – accepted faith.

This account is narrated to the Prophet (sws) and his companions so that they do not get disappointed at the attitude of their people and continue with their preaching. A prophet is deployed by the Almighty at a frontier where good and evil forces are engaged in a conflict; for this reason, he is not allowed to leave that frontier without the permission of God even because of a pious motive. The trials ordained by the Almighty for a prophet have to be endured by him. If he is worried because of one trial it is possible that while trying to save himself from it he ends up facing a greater trial. Similarly, the respite needed by a nation in which the truth is conclusively communicated to it is also essential, as per the established practice of God in this regard. Moreover, it is only God who knows when this has been done. Jonah (sws) out of his own estimation decided that the people of Nineveh will not accept faith even though later events showed that the whole nation had the potential to do so.

The word *إِذْ أَبَقَ إِلَى الْفُلِّ الْمَشْحُونِ* in *أَبَقَ* refers to the incident when Jonah (sws) had left his people for some other destination. Prophets of God never falter because of being overcome with base desires; however, because of their passion to follow the truth at times they exceed limits. Though this attitude is not wrong in itself; in fact, is commendable, however, since prophets of God are a barometer of the truth, so if they show some imbalance in any way even with this pious motive they are checked by the Almighty. A similar blemish emanated from Jonah (sws). When their people did not duly value his preaching, he felt offended and left them thinking that why should he cast pearls before such people. It seems that as soon as he made this decision, he found a ship laden with goods ready to set sail for some destination. The word *مَشْحُونِ* means “ship laden with goods.” The purpose of using this word is to show that being disappointed from his people he wanted to leave them and as per his wish he even found a ship ready to go to someplace and he immediately embarked on it. He did not get the chance to fully reflect on

the whole issue.

فَسَاهَمَ فَكَانَ مِنَ الْمُدْحَضِينَ (١٤١)⁷⁵

As per the tradition to which I have referred to earlier when the time came to cast lots the inhabitants of the ship chose Jonah (sws) for the task. The reason for this probably was that he would have been regarded as the most respectable and dignified person on the ship and the responsibility of casting lots was deemed appropriate for such a person; however, ironically the lot fell on Jonah (sws) himself and as per this divine decree he was pushed away from the ship. It may be kept in mind that the expression عبد أبق is used for a slave who has run away from a chore assigned to him by his master. It was as if Jonah (sws) was regarded as a run-away slave, and as a punishment for this crime was cast into the sea by the ship's inhabitants.

فَالْتَقَمَهُ الْحُوتُ وَهُوَ مُلِيمٌ (١٤٢)⁷⁶

The word حوت signifies a large fish. A sea has large fish like sharks and whales which can swallow a complete human being. Such a fish must have swallowed Jonah (sws). The words وَهُوَ مُلِيمٌ mean that he deserved this calamity which he faced because he had done something on which the Almighty deemed him worthy of admonition. I have already indicated earlier that Jonah (sws) was driven by a pious motive in what he did; however, since he did this without God's permission he was chastised by God and such accountability is always commensurate to one's status; hence, it was quite stern.

فَلَوْلَا أَنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُسَبِّحِينَ (١٤٣) لَلَّيْتُ فِي بَطْنِهِ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ (١٤٤)⁷⁷

The nature of *tasbīh* referred to by the word مُسَبِّحِينَ has already been explained at another place in this exegesis: it refers to chanting of the words: لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ (٢١: ٨٧). These are the best of words which express confession of a sin and seeking of forgiveness from God. Jonah (sws) chanted it and as a result was delivered from his predicament. It seems that as soon as this calamity struck Jonah (sws) it became evident to him that he had been punished by the Almighty and

75. Thus lots were cast and he was pushed away.

76. Thus a fish swallowed him and was blameworthy of rebuke.

77. So had he not been among those who extol the Lord he would have remained in its belly till the Day of Resurrection.

he turned to God with all his heart. The Almighty has informed us that it was the majesty of the words that he uttered which saved him otherwise he would have been overtaken by death in the belly of the fish which swallowed him.

فَنَبَذْنَاهُ بِالْعَرَاءِ وَهُوَ سَقِيمٌ (١٤٥) وَأَنْبَتْنَا عَلَيْهِ شَجَرَةً مِّنْ يَقْطِينٍ (١٤٦)⁷⁸

Finally, at the behest of the Almighty, the fish threw him up on a sandy shore; obviously, at that time he must have been very tired and weak. However, God made a gourd creeper grow above him which protected him on the sea shore from the heat of the sun and after some time he regained his calm.

وَأَرْسَلْنَاهُ إِلَىٰ مِثَّةٍ آلَافٍ أَوْ يَزِيدُونَ (١٤٧) فَأَمَنُوا فَمَتَّعْنَاهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ (١٤٨)⁷⁹

Once he regained his calm, the Almighty once again sent him to his people to preach to them. This time all of them accepted faith and God delivered them from His punishment and let them enjoy the pleasures of life till an appointed time. The word أَوْ (or) also means بَلْ (in fact). It is evident from the Torah that those who professed faith were one hundred and fifty thousand.

Section V: Verses (149-182)

Coming up are the closing verses of the *sūrah*. It ends on the topic it began with. As pointed out many times before, this style of the Qur'ān can be seen in numerous *sūrahs*.

This *sūrah* began with a refutation of the divinity of the angels and of the angels having knowledge of the unseen world (*ghayb*). After that anecdotes of various prophets were narrated to warn the Quraysh. Evident from these accounts is that all the prophets preached the same religion as is being preached to them today. It is also indicated that those who denied their respective messengers were destroyed. God blessed His messengers and their companions. Their name and mission prospered and earned respect in this world and in the next one also they will be given an eternal

78. We thus placed him on dry land and he was exhausted and caused a creeper tree to grow over him.

79. And We sent him to a nation a hundred thousand strong, in fact even more. Thus they professed faith in him; so We let them benefit from pleasures for awhile.

kingdom. It is this topic which occurs here at the end of the *sūrah* in a new style. First, the Idolaters of the Quraysh are challenged that if they have any logical argument for worshipping angels by regarding them to be daughters of God and for setting up a connection between God and the jinn, then they should come forth with it; otherwise, they should fear God. After that, the real status of the angels is explained through the tongue of Gabriel. This is done to inform these people on their foolishness. They are told by the greatest person among angels what status and position they actually have which is quite contrary to the one those who worship them think. At the end, glad tidings are given to the Prophet (sws) that the promise of divine help for God's messengers will be fulfilled in His case as well; so he should continue doing his work with patience; his addressees will soon meet their fate.

Readers may now proceed to study the verses.

فَاسْتَفْتِهِمُ الرَّبِّكَ الْبَنَاتُ وَلَهُمُ الْبَنُونَ (١٤٩) أَمْ خَلَقْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةَ إِنَاثًا وَهُمْ شَاهِدُونَ (١٥٠) أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ مِّنْ إِفْكِهِمْ لَيَقُولُونَ (١٥١) وَلَدَ اللَّهُ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ (١٥٢) أَصْطَفَى الْبَنَاتِ عَلَى الْبَنِينَ (١٥٣) مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ (١٥٤) أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ (١٥٥) أَمْ لَكُمْ سُلْطَانٌ مُّبِينٌ (١٥٦) فَآتُوا بِكِتَابِكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (١٥٧) وَجَعَلُوا بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ الْجَنَّةِ نَسَبًا وَلَقَدْ عَلِمَتِ الْجِنَّةُ إِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ (١٥٨) سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ (١٥٩) إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ (١٦٠) فَإِنَّكُمْ وَمَا تَعْبُدُونَ (١٦١) مَا أَنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ بِفَاتِنِينَ (١٦٢) إِلَّا مَنْ هُوَ صَالِ الْجَحِيمِ (١٦٣) وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ (١٦٤) وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الصَّاقُونَ (١٦٥) وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الْمُسَبِّحُونَ (١٦٦) وَإِنْ كَانُوا لَيَقُولُونَ (١٦٧) لَوْ أَنَّ عِنْدَنَا ذِكْرًا مِّنَ الْأَوَّلِينَ (١٦٨) لَكُنَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ (١٦٩) فَكَفَرُوا بِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ (١٧٠) وَلَقَدْ سَبَقَتْ كَلِمَتُنَا لِعِبَادِنَا الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٧١) إِنَّهُمْ لَهُمُ الْمَنْصُورُونَ (١٧٢) وَإِنَّ جُنَدَنَا لَهُمُ الْعَالِيُونَ (١٧٣) فَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ (١٧٤) وَأَبْصَرَهُمْ فَسَوْفَ يُبْصِرُونَ (١٧٥) أَفَبِعَدَابِنَا يُسْتَعْجِلُونَ (١٧٦) فَإِذَا نَزَلَ بِسَاحَتِهِمْ فَسَاءَ صَبَاحُ الْمُنْذَرِينَ (١٧٧) وَتَوَلَّىٰ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ (١٧٨) وَأَبْصَرَ فَسَوْفَ يُبْصِرُونَ (١٧٩) سُبْحَانَ رَبِّكَ رَبِّ الْعِزَّةِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ (١٨٠) وَسَلَامٌ عَلَى الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٨١) وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (١٨٢)

So ask them: “Are there daughters for your Lord while there are sons for themselves? Did We create the angels as women whilst they were

seeing?” Beware, these people are falsely saying that God has children and these people are absolute liars. Has he preferred daughters over sons? What has come over you? How do you judge so ill? Do you not take heed? Have you a clear proof? Bring forth your book if what you say be true! (149-157)

And they have also set up a relationship between God and the jinn. And the jinn well know that they will be punished. Exalted is God above their imputations! Not so God’s special servants. Thus neither you nor those who you worship can lead astray any but those who are set to enter Hell. (158-163)

And for each of us is an appointed place and We stand arrayed before God. And We glorify Him. (164-166)

And indeed these people used to say: “Had we any teaching of the earlier generations we would have been among God’s chosen servants.” So they rejected it; so they shall soon come to know. (167-170)

And for our special servants sent as messengers this decision of Ours has been already delivered that they are the ones who shall be worthy of help and that Our army only is set to be victorious. So pay no heed to them awhile, and observe them; they shall also soon observe. (171-175)

Do they want to hasten Our punishment? They should remember that when it descends upon them in their courtyards, evil will be the morning of those who have been forewarned. So pay no heed to them awhile, and observe them; they shall also soon observe. (176-179)

Exalted is your Lord, the Lord of Glory, above their imputations! And peace be on the messengers and God alone is worthy of gratitude, Lord of the universe! (180-182)

Explanation

فَاسْتَفْتِهِمُ الرَّبِّكَ الْبَنَاتُ وَلَهُمُ الْبَنُونَ⁸⁰ (١٤٩)

This last section of the *sūrah*, as referred to earlier is linked to the topic discussed at the beginning of the *sūrah*. Though these two parts of the *sūrah* seemed to be far distanced from one another, this distance is only apparent in nature. In reality, the discourse is totally coherent. In the beginning of the *sūrah* after a refutation of the divinity of the angels and the jinn it is with this very word فَاسْتَفْتِهِمُ the discourse from verse eleven onwards digressed to threaten and admonish the Quraysh and to assure the Prophet (sws). This topic continued all through till now. Once it ended, the same word فَاسْتَفْتِهِمُ was mentioned again to link it to its

80. So ask them: “Are there daughters for your Lord while there are sons for themselves?”

previous occurrence and the same topic is taken up. It is said that the Prophet (sws) should inquire from those who worship these angels by regarding them to be daughters of God that if they choose sons for themselves, why do choose daughters for their Lord. The implication is that in the first place imputing sons and daughters to God is extreme ignorance but they displayed even more ignorance by choosing for God something which they would never choose for themselves. It is the requisite of human intellect and nature that they should have ascribed to God the traits that He is worthy of. They committed the cardinal sin of not only attributing to God which was not befitting for Him they ended up ascribing a feature to him which they themselves regarded to be shameful for their own selves.

أَمْ خَلَقْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةَ إِنَاثًا وَهُمْ شَاهِدُونَ (١٥٠)⁸¹

The verse implies that what is the argument on the basis of which they confidently claim that angels are the daughters of God? Did they witness the creation of angels by God? In Sūrah Zukhruf, it is similarly said: وَجَعَلُوا الْمَلَائِكَةَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عِبَادُ الرَّحْمَنِ إِنَاثًا أَشْهَدُوا خَلَقَهُمْ سَتُكْتَبُ شَهَادَتُهُمْ (And they regard the angels who are the servants of the Most Gracious to be women. Were they present at their birth? This testimony of theirs has been noted, and they shall be questioned. (43:19))

أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ مِّنْ إِفْكِهِمْ لَيَقُولُونَ (١٥١) وَلَدَ اللَّهُ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ (١٥٢)⁸²

The verse refers to the fact that these people neither have an intellectual argument nor any scriptural support to back their claim. They have also no visual proof. They are merely concocting that God has children. It is then asserted that these people are absolute liars.

أَصْطَفَى الْبَنَاتِ عَلَى الْبَنِينَ (١٥٣) مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ (١٥٤) أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ (١٥٥)⁸³

The implication of these verses is that if the Almighty was fond of having children, why would he prefer daughters to sons? If He was also capable of producing sons why did He tolerate something which the Idolaters were not ready to put up with unless compelled to.

81. Did We create the angels as women whilst they were seeing?"

82. Beware, these people are falsely saying that God has children and these people are absolute liars.

83. Has he preferred daughters over sons? What has come over you? How do you judge so ill? Do you not take heed?

The words *كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ* imply that what has gone wrong with their intellect that they make such a firm and inalterable decision.

The words *أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ* refer to the fact that this attitude of theirs bears witness that they are people who have lost their sense of reason otherwise why would they have chosen something for God which they are not prepared to choose for themselves. In other words, this thing is not something which even requires any reasoning; it only requires paying slight heed (*تَذَكَّرَ*) to grasp it. A person can very easily come to know of this unless he is extremely foolish and heedless.

أَمْ لَكُمْ سُلْطَانٌ مُبِينٌ (١٥٦) فَأْتُوا بِكِتَابِكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (١٥٧)⁸⁴

The verse asks the disbelievers to present clear evidence if they have it. The expression “clear evidence” has been specified by the verse as “a book.” In other words, if they can back their claim with a testimony from a divine scripture, they should present it. No one has the right to concoct anything about God. He can only say something in this regard if he has a clear argument in its favour. And the clearest of such arguments is His Book which He has revealed for the guidance of His people.

وَجَعَلُوا بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ الْجَنَّةِ نَسَبًا وَلَقَدْ عَلِمَتِ الْجِنَّةُ إِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ (١٥٨) سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ (١٥٩) إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ (١٦٠)⁸⁵

The verse *سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ* is a parenthetical sentence and the verse *وَلَقَدْ عَلِمَتِ الْجِنَّةُ إِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ* is actually linked to *إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ*. Several instances occur in the Qur’ān when something has to be negated forthwith, then such a negation is inserted in the discourse. This is meant to show that a certain thing is so evil and horrific that the speaker is not even ready to wait for the sentence to be completed.

The verses mean that not only were these people imprudent enough to regard angels to be daughters of God but they went as far in their foolishness as to establish a link between God and the jinn: they made the angels as partners in the being of God and made the jinn partners in the rights and attributes of God. God alone is worthy of being worshipped but these wretched people regard the jinn to have the authority to harm and benefit people and to be a means of finding out the

84. Have you a clear proof? Bring forth your book if what you say be true!

85. And they have also set up a relationship between God and the jinn. And the jinn well know that they will be punished. Exalted is God above their imputations! Not so God’s special servants.

matters of the unseen world (*ghayb*), and on the basis of this false notion worship them and present sacrifices and vows before them.

The words وَلَقَدْ عَلِمَتِ الْجِنَّةُ إِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ signify that the jinn themselves are fully convinced that they are creatures of God and they shall one day be held accountable before Him; the sinners among them will be punished for their evil deeds; however, these foolish people have made them partners of God and started to worship them.

The linking of the jinn to God was something so detestable that it needed an immediate rebuttal. The words سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ thus occur right after and say that the exalted person of God is above all such ascriptions; neither is anyone a partner in His being nor His attributes. He is one and alone in His being and attributes; for this reason, the rights He has only belong to Him.

The words إِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ are an exception to لَمُحْضَرُونَ. Since the word مُحْضَرُونَ means that all the jinn will be arrested like criminals and brought before God the exception is meant to explain that only those will be saved from this arrest whom the Almighty according to His established practice guides to the right path because they are worthy of being guided and are thus protected from the lures of Satan.

It beats me what led Zamaksharī⁸⁶ to conclude that the jinn referred to here are angels. I have presented the true interpretation of the verses and hence a refutation of his view is not needed. The Qur’ān mentions angels and jinn as two distinct creations having different traits from one another. There is no possibility of regarding them to be one. What at best can be said is that the jinn are closer with regard to their substance of creation to the angels than human beings. This is because the jinn have been created from fire, the angels from light and human beings from clay.

فَإِنَّكُمْ وَمَا تَعْبُدُونَ (١٦١) مَا أَنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ بِفَاتِنِينَ (١٦٢) إِلَّا مَنْ هُوَ صَالِ الْجَحِيمِ (١٦٣)⁸⁷

In the expression عَلَيْهِ بِفَاتِنِينَ⁸⁸ some exegetes⁸⁸ have interpreted the word غَايَ to means “against” and the antecedent of the pronoun to be God. I am not fully convinced of this interpretation; yet if it is accepted it would mean that in these verses those who worship the jinn are informed that they and the jinn can lure only those people who because of their misdeeds are destined to enter Hell. In other words, what the Almighty had said in

86. See: al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, 66.

87. Thus neither you nor those who you worship can lead astray any but those who are set to enter Hell.

88. See, for example: al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, 67.

response to the challenge thrown by Satan is stated here in a different style. The Almighty had said that Satan will only be able to lead astray those who follow him; he will not be able to influence people devoted to God. The purpose of stating this here is that the trials which the Almighty makes people pass through are not meant to lead them astray; they are only meant to test them. Satan and his accomplices will not be able to harm in any way those of God's people who will try to pass this test.

In the opinion of my mentor, Imām Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī the antecedent of the genitive pronoun is وَمَا تَعْبُدُونَ. In his opinion, the verse would mean: You can only make those people vehemently worship these deities who themselves intend to go to Hell. I am not fully convinced of this interpretation. I have only referred to it so that it can remain in the notice of those who want to reflect on these verses.

وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ (١٦٤) وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الصَّافُّونَ (١٦٥) وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الْمُسَبِّحُونَ (١٦٦)⁸⁹

The previous verses mention the traits and characteristics of the angels from the Almighty; in these verses, archangel Gabriel, at the behest of the Almighty, explains his own status and that of all the angels before God and what keeps them busy in His presence. The purpose is to disgrace those people who worship them considering them to be partners of God so that they hear from the very tongue of the archangel what their status is in contrast to what these foolish people are ascribing to these angels.

It needs to be kept in mind that there are a number of places in the Qur'ān where during a discourse something is said directly through the tongue of Gabriel. Verses 64-65 of Sūrah Maryam present an example of this. This style is adopted at places where an utterance from the tongue of Gabriel becomes more eloquent. This is one such instance. The most effective thing that could have rebutted the view of those who were inflicted with the false notion of angels being partners of God was a statement to the contrary by the angels themselves. Thus there could not have been a greater testimony than that of Gabriel's just referred to testimony about the status of his own self and that of other angels. Let us now see what Gabriel has testified to in this regard.

The first thing that he has said is that the circle of activity of every angel is prescribed and they have limited access (وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ). His own circle of authority is also limited and he cannot exceed that. Readers are advised to look up my explanation of the first verse of Sūrah

89. And for each of us is an appointed place and We stand arrayed before God. And We glorify Him.

Fāṭir. It is thus evident that the status of the angels is nothing but obedient and submissive workers; they can neither cross their limit nor interfere in any matter without God's permission nor can they dare take the initiative in doing any task. So how foolish are those who regard these subservient angels to be partners of God and expect that these angels can do for them whatever they desire; so much so, even if God intends to punish them, the angels will be able to save them.

The second thing that is stated is that the angels always stand arrayed before God and keep glorifying Him (وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الصَّافُّونَ وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الْمُسَبِّحُونَ). The first verse of the *sūrah* also mentions angels standing in rows before God and I have explained this there. The word مُسَبِّحُونَ refers to precisely what the words ذُكِّرَا refer to in the beginning of the *sūrah*. In my opinion, this is an allusion to the prayer of the angels around the throne of the Almighty which is the greatest manifestation of they being servants of God. In the beginning of the *sūrah*, this prayer was referred by the word ذُكِّرَا and here it is called تَسْبِيحٌ. The Qur'ān has alluded to the prayer by both these words. The dominant meaning of تَسْبِيحٌ is to absolve God from all concepts and ascriptions that are against and beyond His majesty. By using this word, Gabriel has actually clarified that angels are busy absolving God of all negative ascriptions what to speak of being regarded as partners of God.

وَإِنْ كَانُوا لَيَقُولُونَ (١٦٧) لَوْ أَنَّ عِنْدَنَا ذِكْرًا مِّنَ الْأَوَّلِينَ (١٦٨) لَكُنَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ (١٦٩) فَكَفَرُوا بِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ (١٧٠)⁹⁰

The topic brought up in these verses is also discussed in verse 42 of Sūrah Fāṭir and I have explained it there. When it would be mentioned before the Quraysh that the Jews and other nations had rejected their prophets and messengers they would arrogantly mock at them. They would say that had the teaching of the earlier people come to them or had a messenger of God come to them, they would not have adopted this attitude; they would have followed his teachings and would have proven themselves to be special servants of God.

It is common practice that if a person does not have something, he often claims that had he been blessed with that thing he would have accomplished great feats; however, when he actually receives that thing more often than not he becomes a worse failure than those before him.

90. And indeed these people used to say: "Had we any teaching of the earlier generations we would have been among God's chosen servants." So they rejected it; so they shall soon come to know.

Today there are many people who haughtily claim that if they are given the reins of government they will once again show to the world a glimpse of the caliph ‘Umar’s rule; however, when they are put to test, they prove to be failures, embezzlers and thieves at the very first step. Very few people prove worthy of the task and not a single one proves successful from among those who make such tall claims. The whole history of the world bears witness to this.

The words فَكَفَرُوا بِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ say that when the thing these people were desirous of came to them, they rejected it and tried to find various excuses to deny it; so they will soon know the fate of this denial.

وَلَقَدْ سَبَقَتْ كَلِمَتُنَا لِعِبَادِنَا الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٧١) إِنَّهُمْ لَهُمُ الْمَنْصُورُونَ (١٧٢) وَإِنَّ جُنَدَنَا لَهُمُ الْغَالِبُونَ (١٧٣)⁹¹

This is a reference to the fate that is necessarily faced by the rejecters of messengers of God, and the purpose is to warn the Quraysh: if they do not mend their ways then the same established practice of God will materialize for them which materialized for other rejecters before them.

The word كَلِمَةٌ refers to the established practice of the Almighty which relates to His messengers and is mentioned at various instances in the Qur’ān. At one place, it is described thus:

كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَأَعْلَيْنَ أَنَا وَرُسُلِي إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ (٥٨: ٢٠-٢١)

The Almighty has ordained: “I and My messengers shall always prevail.” Indeed, Allah is Mighty and Powerful. (58:20-21)

At another place, the words are:

إِنَّا لَنَنْصُرُ رُسُلَنَا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ يَقُومُ الْأَشْهَادُ (٤٠: ٥١)

And We necessarily help Our messengers and the true believers in the life of this world and will also help them on the day when the witnesses rise to testify. (40:51)

I have explained at a number of instances in this exegesis that a nation which does not profess faith after the Almighty conclusively communicates the truth to it through His messenger is necessarily

91. And for our special servants sent as messengers this decision of Ours has been already delivered that they are the ones who shall be worthy of help and that Our army only is set to be victorious.

destroyed. A messenger is the final means of communicating the truth to his people; for this reason, his status is that of a court of justice for them. The struggle between good and evil which ensues through him culminates in his and his companions' dominance and in the destruction of his foes. I have explained all the phases of this established practice at appropriate instances. Here, the difference between a *nabī* (prophet) and a *rasūl* (messenger) should also be kept in mind by the readers that I have endeavoured to explain in this exegesis.

The words *وَإِنَّ جُنَدَنَا لَهُمُ الْغَالِبُونَ* imply that a whole army of God's angels is at the support of a messenger and his companions, and none can defeat those which have such support. A messenger and his companions are indeed faced with trials but in the end victory is theirs.

فَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ (١٧٤) وَأَبْصِرْهُمْ فَسَوْفَ يُبْصِرُونَ (١٧٥)⁹²

These verses are meant to assure the Prophet (sws) and to urge him to wait and show patience. The implication is that he should ignore the excesses committed by his adversaries so that God conclusively communicates the truth to them and they are left with no excuse to deny it. For a while, the Prophet (sws) should just observe what they are earning; they too will soon see what they have earned and in what shape its fate appeared before them.

أَفْعِدَابِنَا يَسْتَغْجِلُونَ (١٧٦) فَإِذَا نَزَلَ بِسَاحَتِهِمْ فَسَاءَ صَبَاحُ الْمُنْذَرِينَ (١٧٧) وَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ (١٧٨) وَأَبْصِرْ فَسَوْفَ يُبْصِرُونَ (١٧٩)⁹³

The verses state that the Prophet (sws) should inform his addressees that the punishment with which they are being warned of is not something trivial. These addressees were the ones who were asking him to hasten this punishment and would say that unless they are shown a sample of it, they will not profess faith. When this punishment alights in their houses it will spell doom for those had been warned of it. The punishment which comes on the addressees of a messenger of God after they have warned them totally decimates them.

It may be kept in mind that in Arabia the actual time at which caravans

92. So pay no heed to them awhile, and observe them; they shall also soon observe.

93. Do they want to hasten Our punishment? They should remember that when it descends upon them in their courtyards, evil will be the morning of those who have been forewarned. So pay no heed to them awhile, and observe them; they shall also soon observe.

were raided was morning. For this reason, the word صباح connotes attack and raids. The proclamation in the word وا صباحا also carries this meaning.

After this, the topic of assurance and warning is repeated that was discussed earlier in verses 174-175: the Prophet (sws) is assured that he should ignore the misdemeanour of his enemies a little more and wait a while; the disbelievers are warned that very soon they will see from their very eyes all that with which they are being informed of.

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّكَ رَبِّ الْعِزَّةِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ (١٨٠)⁹⁴

The verse states that exalted is God – the real master of all power and sovereignty – beyond all things these Idolaters ascribe to Him. He has informed them of their baseless views and their consequences; if they now do not desist from these things, they will see their fate.

وَسَلَامٌ عَلَى الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٨١)⁹⁵

Just as after the mention of the anecdotes of other prophets earlier, each was given the glad tidings of peace here at the end this glad tidings is given to the prophet Muḥammad (sws). He is informed that the established practice of God which has materialized for all His messengers stands true for him as well; peace is for all messengers of God; destruction for all their enemies.

وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (١٨٢)⁹⁶

God alone is worthy of being thanked and praised. Hence in this struggle between the truth and falsehood He will definitely make the truth prevail and defeat falsehood. He is the Lord of the universe; it is the requisite of this state of His that justice prevail in this world as well as in that to come. This is the requisite of His providence and it is on this basis that He is worthy of gratitude and praise in this world and in the next one.

With these lines, the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah* comes to its completion. فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (so gratitude be to the Lord of the worlds)

Raḥmānābād
29th April 1975

94. Exalted is your Lord, the Lord of Glory, above their imputations!

95. And peace be on the messengers

96. And God alone is worthy of gratitude, Lord of the universe!